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"To retrieve what was left": Archival Impulses in Caribbean Diasporic Fiction

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“To retrieve what was left”: Archival Impulses in Caribbean Diasporic Fiction

by

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“I am, we are, in the Diaspora, bodies occupied, emptied and occupied. If we return . . . it is to retrieve what was left, to look at it—even if it is an old sack, threadbare with time, empty itself of meaning.”

--Dionne Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return* (2001)

“If the Archive is a place of dreams, it permits this one, above all others [. . .] of making the dead walk and talk.”

--Carolyn Steedman, *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History* (2002)

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Preface

Travels

As a U.S. citizen who spent the first two decades of her life in a land-locked, rural, demographically homogeneous part of the Midwest, I had limited exposure to Caribbean voices or cultures. Far removed from "big city" hubs of Caribbean diaspora (i.e., New York, Miami, Toronto), far removed from the Sargasso Sea and the Caribbean Basin, my (mis)conception of the Antilles and its peoples was hazy at best. It was in part a bricolage of pop culture, news coverage, and canonical literature: equal parts Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* (1883) and Disney's *Cool Runnings* (1993), UB40 and Ricky Martin, *Daily Show* and *60 Minutes* pieces about Elián González. However, I suspect that like many Euro-descended citizens of the United States, when I thought about the Caribbean, my first frame of reference was tourism—glossy travel advertisements in magazines, sea and sand-filled commercials for tropical resorts, and cruise packages that game show contestants scrambled to win.

It is unremarkable then, that my most direct first contact with the Caribbean was a vicarious tourist experience. When I was twelve, my parents took a cruise to the Bahamas, visiting the capitol city of Nassau. They returned with stories of friendly Bahamians and beautiful water, and with trinkets for my brother and me. My brother's was a small sculpture of a leaping dolphin—mine, a sculpture of a placid-faced tortoise. Both were made of whorled gray plastic, melted down and molded by their skilled

artisan. My parents, though thoughtful, intellectually curious people by nature, had not read Jamaica Kincaid's *A Small Place* (1988) prior to their journey. So I don't know if, as tourists, they felt like "ugly human being[s]" (Kincaid Loc. 122). I don't know if the possibility occurred to them that, "the people who inhabit the place in which you have just paused can't stand you, that behind closed doors they laugh at your strangeness" (Kincaid Loc. 144-47). I don't know if they got "that slightly funny feeling you have from time to time about exploitation, oppression, and domination" (Kincaid Loc. 82-83). If they felt these things, perhaps they didn't know how to tell us about them. As children, we didn't know to ask. Nearly two decades later, I still have my tortoise. When I moved to Texas in order to pursue my PhD, it came, too, carefully wrapped in newspaper and packed away with other small treasures. Today it sits on my bookshelf, where it gazes at a copy of Orlando Patterson's *Slavery and Social Death* (1982)—regarding the historical conditions that predicated its own existence with wide, unblinking eyes.

In the years since my parents' journey, I have likewise learned to regard unflinchingly the U.S.'s history of domination in the Caribbean. I have learned to view their trip as a microcosm of the neocolonial relationship that the tourist industry perpetuates between my nation of birth and the nations of the Caribbean. I have learned to look back and see how my own life has coincided with U.S. political, economic, and military interventions in the Antilles: in October 1983, a mere three months after my birth, the United States invaded the island of Grenada, waging the infamous "lovely little war." The year of my tenth birthday, the United States Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit ruled that Congress could repeal Puerto Rico's Constitution at will, bluntly

reiterating that island's status as colony. Debates about the Cuban embargo and news coverage of Haiti's political strife (spurred by the C.I.A.-backed coups of 1991 and 2004) have been constants throughout my life. The very day I completed this preface, news reports surfaced revealing that the National Security Administration has been recording all cell-phone calls placed in the Bahamas (Devereaux, Greenwald, Poitras). Such actions, and centuries' worth of similar imperialist and racist violations, are the historical conditions predicating my own existence as a Euro-descended citizen of the United States.

I thus come to this project deeply aware of the "strangeness" of someone in my subject position writing about the Caribbean and its diasporas. In the process of completing this study, as well as during my own scholarly travels to Caribbean nations and communities, I have had the "slightly funny" feelings described by Kincaid. Unlike her imagined tourist, however, I stay with those feelings, allowing them "develop into full-fledged unease, discomfort" (Kincaid Loc. 83). In doing so, I aspire to something other than tourism. The tourist travels purely for pleasure, returning home unperturbed, free to forget what she has seen. While my work has often been a source of pleasure, I refuse to forget what I have learned and felt; that refusal keeps me mindful about how I conduct my own relations with the Caribbean.

In this dissertation, I attempt to be a more ethical version of what Derek Walcott calls the traveller—a "compassionate and beguiled outsider" ("The Antilles"). I come to Caribbean diasporic literatures in the pursuit of knowledge, staying for a time in a place that is not my home. Unlike Walcott's traveller, however, I recognize the incompleteness

of my own understanding and consider myself here at the sufferance of others. I also acknowledge that the Antillean archipelago has the power "to write itself" ("The Antilles"). I thus strive to honor the people in whose place I travel by listening intently. The rhythms and cadences of the Caribbean are not mine; I have had to learn how to hear them through the noise of my own culture, and even then I cannot claim to decipher all of their nuances. Accordingly, whenever possible, I have taken instruction from and foregrounded the voices, writings, and lived experiences of Caribbean and Caribbean diasporic subjects. It is my hope that through such ethical traveling, I will earn the privilege to return, to become "a lover of that particular part of the earth" that is the Caribbean and its literatures ("The Antilles"). What I get right in the following pages is thanks to the tireless labor of generations of intellectuals and artists whose roots are in the Antilles. What I get wrong is due to my own mishearing and mistranslation. I have many more travels to take, and much listening still to do.

"To retrieve what was left": Archival Impulses in Caribbean Diasporic Fiction

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Supervisor: Jennifer M. Wilks

This dissertation analyzes a recurring phenomenon in late-twentieth and early twenty-first century diasporic Caribbean novels that I label the "archival impulse"—by which I mean depictions of artifacts, documents, collection, and curatorship. Archives have a particularly pernicious history in the Caribbean, where they have been deployed by colonial and totalitarian regimes alike to dictate who is considered human, to silence sub-altern voices, and to legitimize state violence. *"To retrieve what was left"* thus conceives of the archive itself as a source of trauma for Caribbean subjects, and the archival impulse as authors' efforts to confront that trauma. This impulse marks an important shift in how and why Caribbean literatures reconstruct the past. While previous generations of Caribbean writers imagined corrective histories to enact political resistance, the texts I examine are also deeply interested in the psychological effects of encountering history. Archival materials, as physical remnants of the past, are ideal points of focus for dramatizing such encounters.

I identify two iterations of the archival impulse in diasporic literature from the Anglophone and Spanish-speaking Caribbeans. The first, which I examine in Michelle

Cliff's *Abeng* (1985) and *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987), as well as Julia Alvarez's *In the Name of Salomé* (2000), portrays archives and curatorial practices in order to acknowledge the fragmented, indeterminate, and often, painful nature of the Caribbean past. These works attempt to heal that past by generating counterarchives and provisional histories. In contrast, the second iteration, which I theorize using Dionne Brand's *At the Full and Change of the Moon* (1999) and Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007), is circumspect about redemptive histories. These texts depict archives and curatorship to emphasize the irreparable aspects of Caribbean history. Dwelling on the psychic pain inflicted by encounters with the past, these works suggest that even tentative narratives of healing are forced—and perhaps damaging to Caribbean subjects. Ultimately, this dissertation asks what obligation Caribbean literature has to the region's history: whether to work through history for purposes of recuperation, or to demand a reckoning with history as an unhealed and un-healable trauma?

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Introduction: Archives and Archipelagos: Caribbean Literatures, History, and Trauma

"Where are your monuments, your battles, martyrs?
Where is your tribal memory? Sirs,
in that grey vault. The sea. The sea
has locked them up. The sea is History."
--Derek Walcott, "The Sea is History"

"To retrieve what was left" analyzes a recurring phenomenon in late-twentieth and early twenty-first century diasporic Caribbean novels that I label the "archival impulse"—by which I mean depictions of artifacts, documents, collection, and curatorship—arguing that this impulse marks an important shift in how and why Caribbean literatures reconstruct the past. While previous generations of Caribbean writers imagined corrective histories to enact political resistance, the texts I examine are also deeply interested in the psychological effects of encountering history. Archival materials, as physical remnants of the past, are ideal points of focus for dramatizing such encounters. I identify two divergent iterations of the archival impulse in diasporic literature from the Anglophone and Spanish-speaking Caribbeans. The first, which I examine in Michelle Cliff's *Abeng* (1985) and *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987), as well as Julia Alvarez's *In the Name of Salomé* (2000), portrays archives and curatorial practices in order to acknowledge the fragmented, indeterminate, and often, painful nature of the Caribbean past. These works attempt to heal that past by generating counterarchives and provisional histories. In contrast, the second iteration, which I theorize using Dionne Brand's *At the Full and Change of the Moon* (1999) and Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007), is circumspect about redemptive histories. These

texts depict archives and curatorship to emphasize the irreparable aspects of Caribbean history. Dwelling on the psychic pain inflicted by encounters with the past, these works suggest that even tentative narratives of healing are forced—and perhaps damaging to Caribbean subjects. Ultimately, my project asks what obligation (if any) Caribbean literature has to the region's history: whether to work through history for purposes of recuperation, or to demand a reckoning with history as an unhealed and un-healable trauma.

Archives have a particularly pernicious history in the Caribbean, where they have been deployed by colonial and totalitarian regimes alike to dictate who is considered human, to silence sub-altern voices, and to legitimize state violence. My dissertation thus conceives of the archive itself as a source of trauma for diasporic Caribbean subjects, and the archival impulse as authors' efforts to confront that trauma. I take a comparative, hemispheric approach in my project because I find that both the archival impulse as a phenomenon and the Caribbean as a region demand it. The collections imagined by the authors I study are open-ended and marked by excess, gesturing outside of themselves to other documents, histories, and geographies—thus reflecting the Caribbean's ongoing relationship with itself, and with the rest of the Americas. Furthermore, in thinking through the archive as a source of trauma for the Caribbean, my project engages with current theoretical debates about the necessity of healing and the political utility of prolonged mourning. *"To retrieve what was left"* suggests that working through trauma may be a privilege denied to some communities, and that while mourning is indeed political, it is not the only—nor always the best—means of addressing painful histories.

OPACITÉ AND CROSS CULTURAL ANALYSIS

In his 1969 essay "Caribbean Critics," Kamau Brathwaite describes one of the most significant problems then facing Caribbean and Caribbean diasporic literatures: the tendency of scholars to read these works from a Euro-centric perspective, ignoring the region's distinctive cultures and histories. He writes that, "We are therefore faced with the strange situation where the work of a body of writers . . . is examined in a more or less 'academic' fashion by a body of critics trained to respond almost exclusively to European influences" (Brathwaite 117). While Caribbean and diasporic voices have gained traction in the academy since Brathwaite's writing, the problem he cites has not disappeared. Indeed, nearly half a century later, Junot Díaz laments "'the right of the white writer to write about people of colour without considering the critiques of people of colour'" (Flood).[1] In an attempt to avoid perpetuating such academic colonialism, I've adopted a number of strategies to guide my readings of the texts examined in this study.

First and foremost, I acknowledge that these works and their authors have what Martinican scholar Édouard Glissant calls the right to opacité (opacity) or "opaqueness—that is, the irreducible density of the other" (133). The concept of opacité as theorized by Glissant suggests that it is both impossible and undesirable to claim complete understanding of an other's culture. To insist on what he calls transparence (transparency) is a form of intellectual imperialism, demanding universalism rather than respecting a culture's right to integrity and untranslatability. The comparative nature of this project—which analyzes works by authors who hail from two linguistic regions and

[1] Díaz is speaking here of creative writing, but in various public appearances, he has made similar criticisms of academic writing.

three islands in the Caribbean—would make it problematic for an individual scholar to claim comprehensive, insider knowledge of each culture represented in the following pages. Therefore, like any ethical researcher, I have done my best to educate myself; however, I also attempt to acknowledge those moments in which I cannot fully "translate" the cultural nuances of the works I analyze.

Out of respect for opacité, I have also sought whenever possible to privilege Caribbean and diasporic voices in developing my readings of each text. This has meant drawing on sources by Caribbean scholars and attending to their explanations of the region's histories, cultures, epistemologies, and identities. It has also meant treating the novels I'm examining not only as literature, but also as theoretical texts in their own right. In my analyses, I seek each work's unique formulations of archive, history, Caribbeanness, and trauma. Similarly, it has meant treating the authors of these works as theorists. I incorporate portions of their interviews and non-fiction writings, not to make any claims about authorial intention in my interpretations of their novels, but to place their fiction within their larger intellectual trajectories. In doing so, I attempt to offer a holistic (but in no way exhaustive) picture of each writer's thought and its contributions to Caribbean discourses. Finally, it has meant being receptive to the critiques of Caribbean scholars. I presented early versions of each of the following chapters at different Caribbean studies conferences; the iterations found here are indebted to the intellectual generosity of fellow panelists and scholars, who offered suggestions and constructive critiques.

DEFINING ARCHIVE AND ARCHIVAL IMPULSE

For the sake of clarity, I think it necessary before proceeding any further to define two terms central to this project: archive and archival impulse. The word "archive" typically invokes an image of written documents carefully preserved and catalogued within brick-and-mortar structures, often located in universities or in seats of government power. The authors whose works I examine do frequently make use of such archives in the process of writing their novels: Julia Alvarez draws upon the Henríquez Ureña archives housed in Havana, Dionne Brand and Michelle Cliff are both inspired by visits to museums, and Junot Díaz utilizes the Archivo General de la Nación (General Archive of the Nation) in the Dominican Republic.

However, each author is also very aware that centuries of colonial domination, enslavement, and in some instances the emergence of totalitarian governments, mean that the documents housed at such sites elide minoritarian subjectivities and narratives from the historical record—an issue to which I will return in more detail later in this introduction. As such, these authors' works demand equal consideration for *unwritten* forms of documentation and knowledge transmission. The authors I examine thus echo scholars like Diana Taylor who have suggested that archives can live in ephemera and orality—what Taylor calls the repertoire. Accordingly, my definition of the archive places written documents and visual artifacts alongside such atypically archival material as rumors, oral testimonies, legends, ghosts, and embodied practices.

As is implied by the materials I consider archival, the texts I examine also demand acknowledgement that cultural history can be housed in a multitude of locations

other than archival institutions in the colonial or national metropole. Scholars such as Ann Cvetkovich and Sarah Ahmed suggest that archives can live in a multitude of locations, including "personal and intimate spaces" (Cvetkovich 244) and in "everyday forms of contact (with friends, families, others)" (*Cultural Politics* 14). My analysis is thus attentive to these works' portrayal of the ways that historical information disseminates across sites public and private, local and metropolitan, material and immaterial. Ultimately, I contend that by pushing against the traditional definition of archive to incorporate unconventional materials and sites, the authors I examine generate what Cvetkovich has called a "counterarchive" (120)—an archive that simultaneously makes the constructedness of dominant histories legible and suggests alternate historical narratives.

The "archival impulses" of my dissertation's subtitle is drawn from the work of art critic and historian Hal Foster. He develops the phrase to describe a tendency of postmodern, multimedia art to use assemblage, collage, etc., "to make historical information, often lost or displaced, physically present" (Foster 4).[2] He argues that such works draw on and simultaneously produce archives by placing artifacts in physical conjunction. Foster is primarily interested in what this kind of art has to say about capitalist production and U.S. cultural memory, but I find his term highly useful for my own project, as it suggests archiving can be the subject (i.e., an impulse *for* the archive) and the methodology (i.e., an impulse *to* archive) of creative works. I thus adapt the phrase to describe the deployment of archives and archiving as means by which

[2] He cites the works of Thomas Hirschhorn, Tacita Dean, and Sam Durant as examples of the archival impulse.

Caribbean diasporic authors develop their novels, and the appearance of archives and curatorship as recurring tropes within those novels. I use the plural archival impuls*es* in order to acknowledge the multiple cultural and emotional ends to which the practice can be used—ends that I will elaborate upon in the following chapters.

I emphasize three characteristics of the archival impulse in my own definition of the term. First, unlike Jacques Derrida's mal d'archive, the Caribbean archival impulse is not an "irrepressible desire to return to the origin, a homesickness, a nostalgia for the return to the most archaic place of absolute commencement" (91). Rather, it is characterized by a fascination with "obscure traces" (Foster 5) and an acceptance of indeterminacy. This formulation is uniquely suited to Caribbean and diasporic contexts, where histories of dispersal, fragmentation, and cultural syncretism make it difficult to speak of unified origins. Likewise, when "obscure traces" of colonized, enslaved, and racialized subjectivities are often all that make it into the written record, embracing indeterminacy is frequently a pre-condition for imagining one's own history as a Caribbean subject. Second, the archival impulse "underscores the nature of all archival materials as found yet constructive, factual yet fictive, public yet private" (Foster 5), and recognizes that archival work is "always incomplete" (Foster 12).[3] A hallmark of the fiction I analyze in this study is its tendency to interrogate the authority and scope of individual archives, and its recognition that archives are constructs that make other constructs (personal identities, national histories, colonial epistemologies, family narratives, etc.) possible. Finally, the archival impulse connects disparate fragments, not

[3] In this, the archival impulse reiterates Derrida's observation that, "the archivist produces more archive, and that is why the archive is never closed. It opens out of the future" (68).

out of a desire to "totalize," but out of a desire "to relate—to probe a misplaced past, to collate its different signs . . . to ascertain what might remain for the present" (Foster 21). Each of the works I examine in this dissertation encourage suspicion of totalizing histories, and query how (or if) the "misplaced past" of the Caribbean and its diasporas can be constructively brought to bear on the present.

To be clear, mine is not the first, nor is it the only examination of how archives and fiction intermingle in the Caribbean. One of the first was Roberto González Echevarría's *Myth and Archive* (1998), which argues that the Latin American novel had its beginnings in the archive, "a specifically Hispanic institution created at the same time as the New World was being settled" (29).[4] González Echevarría's study is both expansive and complex, arguing that the Latin American literary tradition is deeply indebted to the scientific, anthropological, and legal discourses that made up colonial records. He suggests that what he terms archival fictions—texts that exhibit a fascination with archival documents, unfinished manuscripts, historians, and writing—are an expression of longing for origins, for a "grandiose politico-cultural metastory" (González Echevarría 175). By returning to the archive these fictions, even those that highlight the contradictions and discontinuities of historical records, thus perpetuate its centrality to Latin American cultures.

A more recent study by Wendy Walters, *Archives of the Black Atlantic* (2013), traces the archive as a trope in African Diasporic literatures from the United States and the Caribbean. Walters argues that archives have long been a recurring preoccupation for

[4] He includes Caribbean authors such as Alejo Carpentier, Miguel Barnet, and Gabriel García Marquez in this genealogy.

black authors, citing numerous novelists and poets who depict archival documents and/or archival research in their writings—including Toni Morrison, Elizabeth Alexander, and Michelle Cliff. She suggests such literary works demonstrate that historical documents are "as open to interpretive pressure as the creative text itself" (Walters 4), and thus teach "us to read the archives of history anew" (Walters 1). Ultimately, Walters argues that these works open up a space of possibility to imagine alternate histories of "agency, humanity, and empowerment" (1), thus exploding the limitations that the archive has traditionally placed on the writing of African Diasporic histories.

While I am indebted to these two studies (particularly Walter's), my dissertation differs from them in both its scope and in its conclusions. While González Echevarría's and Walters' work can be considered comparative in that they each analyze texts by authors from varying national backgrounds, they fit within the well-established disciplinary boundaries of African Diaspora and Latin American studies. Using the archival impulse as its organizing structure, *"To retrieve what was left"* puts these two fields in conversation in an attempt to trouble one of the major linguistic and ethnic boundaries that has historically divided the Caribbean within itself. Furthermore, whereas González Echevarría echoes Derrida in theorizing the fascination with archive as a longing for origins, I eschew such formulations in my definition of the archival impulse. Instead, I propose that depicting the archive is the grounds by which Caribbean diasporic authors confront the legacies of historical trauma that have made unified origins an impossibility for them. Finally, while Walters offers a reading of the archival trope in African Diaspora literatures as uniformly liberatory, my study asks what happens when

the alternate histories made visible by the archive offer additional psychic pain rather than liberation or empowerment.

"To retrieve what was left" conceives of the archival impulse as a Pan-Caribbean phenomenon, taking a multitude of forms in order to respond to the distinct cultural histories and needs of individual authors. The archive as a discursive structure, described by Achille Mbembe as "pieces of time to be assembled, fragments of time to be placed in order in an attempt to formulate a story" (21), is reflective of both the Caribbean's own fragmented histories, and of long-standing artistic practices throughout the islands and in diaspora. Indeed, as Derek Walcott argues in "The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory" (1992), the "gathering of broken pieces is the pain and care of the Antilles [. . . .] Antillean art is this restoration of our shattered histories, our shards of vocabulary."[5] Entering the space of the archive—literally and/or imaginatively—is a way for Caribbean authors to access those "broken pieces" of the past, to concretize its brokenness for the reader, and to examine the psychological impact of encounters with the remains of history.

TRAUMA IN CARIBBEAN CONTEXTS

In addition to clarifying what I mean by archive and archival impulse, it's also necessary to define a third term that is central to my study: trauma. Theories of trauma, indebted as they are to the field of psychology, have in the past tended to conceive of trauma as an individualized psychic phenomenon resulting from a distinct, extremely

[5] See Glissant's *Caribbean Discourse* (1989) and Antonio Benítez-Rojo's *The Repeating Island* (1992) for similar perceptions of Antillean artistic practices in the Francophone and Spanish-speaking Caribbeans.

violent event. In the hugely influential *Unclaimed Experience* (1996), Cathy Caruth defines trauma as an "overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event often occurs in the delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomenon" (11).[6] Similar formulations have been widely deployed by other trauma theorists, particularly Shoah studies scholars like Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, who are invested in survivor experiences. However, for the Caribbean and its diasporas, this definition of trauma is incomplete. It cannot account for how phenomena that do not involve physical violence (such as racist rhetoric) can be traumatizing. Nor can it describe the effects of phenomena such as political terror on populations at large. And finally, it cannot account for the lingering effects of historical cataclysms whose survivors are long dead, such as the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. In order to more accurately reflect the lived experiences of Caribbean and Caribbean diasporic subjects, this dissertation draws on three inter-related theories of trauma.

The first is Laura Brown's conception of "insidious" trauma, which has been instrumental to thinking through the ways that everyday experiences can be traumatizing. In "Not Outside the Range" (1995), Brown describes insidious trauma as "the traumatogenic effects of oppression that are not necessarily overtly violent or threatening to bodily well-being at the given moment but that do violence to the soul and spirit" (107). Such oppression includes what are frequently called microaggressions—those "minor" moments of racist, sexist, or homophobic hostility that, although nonviolent and

[6] Dominick LaCapra labels this compulsion to repeat "acting out": "In acting out, tenses implode, and it is as if one were back there in the past reliving the traumatic scene" (*Writing History* 21).

commonplace, highlight the "absence of safety in the daily lives of women and other nondominant groups" (Brown 105). As this description suggests, insidious trauma is the cumulative effect of multiple experiences rather than the product of a single, extreme event, which makes it more difficult to treat. Cvetkovich notes that in order to cure insidious trauma, we "need to change social structures more broadly rather than just fix individual people" (33). Experiences familiar to Caribbean migrants such as xenophobia and racism obviously fall within this category. I would suggest that so do recurring encounters with histories that deny Caribbean subjectivities.

The link that Cvetkovich proposes between insidious trauma and larger social structures leads me to the second theorization of trauma deployed in this study: communal or cultural trauma. Early conceptions of communal trauma, such as Kai Erickson's "Notes on Trauma and Community" (1995), echoed Caruth in that they typically focused on a single cataclysmic event that had occurred within living memory.[7] Erickson argues that communal trauma "can take two forms, either alone or in combination: damage to the tissues that hold human groups intact, and the creation of social climates, communal moods, that come to dominate a group's spirit" (190). Theorists of cultural trauma reach similar conclusions about how trauma effects populations. Ron Eyerman, for instance, explains that, "cultural trauma refers to a dramatic loss of identity and meaning, a tear in the social fabric" (2).[8] Significantly, however, they abandon the belief that the traumatic event need have occurred within

[7] Erickson writes about the devastation of Buffalo Creek, West Virginia by a flood in 1972.

[8] Jeffrey Alexander offers a similar formulation: "Trauma is not the result of a group experiencing pain. It is the result of . . . acute discomfort entering into the core of the collectivity's sense of its own identity" (10).

living memory—Eyerman, along with Neil J. Smelser, claims slavery as a cultural trauma for African Americans. Events from Caribbean and diasporic history such as migration, exile, and political terror would likewise fall within this category.

The final theorization I incorporate in this study is transgenerational trauma, which builds upon the recognition that one need not have experienced a cataclysmic event directly in order to be affected by it.[9] Theories of transgenerational trauma emerged in the 1960s during studies of the children of Holocaust survivors; among the most influential of these on my own thinking is Nicholas Abraham's theory of the phantom. Abraham describes the phantom as, "a formation of the unconscious that has never been conscious [. . .] it passes—in a way yet to be determined—from the parent's unconscious into the child's" ("Notes" 173). This phantom is the survivor's inheritance, resulting from some unspeakable trauma in the parent's (or grandparent's) life. Gabriele Schwab builds upon Abraham's theory in *Haunting Legacies* (2010), suggesting that the phantom of parental trauma is transmitted affectively, through "silences and memory traces hidden in a face that is frozen in grief, a forced smile that does not feel quite right, an apparently unmotivated flare-up of rage, or chronic depression" (Loc. 258-59). She argues that the "psychic deformations" (Schwab Loc. 108-109) instantiated by parental trauma can thus be passed on from generation to generation, indefinitely. Works such as Díaz's *Oscar Wao*, which examines how the violence of the Trujillo regime affects a generation of diasporic Dominicans born after the dictator's assassination, or Dionne Brand's *At the*

[9] Marianne Hirsch's theory of postmemory makes a similar claim. She writes that postmemory "is distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection [. . . .] [p]ostmemory characterizes the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation shaped by traumatic events that can neither be understood nor recreated" (22)

Full, which explores how slavery haunts present-day Caribbean subjects, demonstrate very clearly the need to consider trauma in transgenerational terms.

By asserting that trauma is experienced as both a psychological *and* a structural phenomenon in the Caribbean and its diasporas, my project responds to what Cvetkovich identifies as a need within trauma studies for "a fuller examination of racialized histories of genocide, colonization, slavery, and migration that are part of the violences of modernity" (37). I thus position myself within a growing body of scholarship—spearheaded by critics such as Matt Richardson, Saidiya Hartman, David L. Eng, and Anne Anlin Cheng—that interrogates the structures of trauma that are constitutive of life under transnational capital in the New World. Within my analyses, I attempt to acknowledge both the culturally and historically specific ways such traumas can manifest, and to account for how they shape distinct Caribbean literatures and identities.

SUBTERRANEAN CONVERGENCES AND OTHER AMERICAS

"To retrieve what was left" contributes to two ongoing scholarly developments specific to the study of Caribbean and Caribbean diasporic literatures. The first is the effort to produce comparative studies of the region that transcend what Glissant, in 1969, called the "balkanization" (222) of the Caribbean: the sub-division of the islands along the linguistic, ethnic, and political lines instantiated by European imperialism. Throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, thinkers such as Glissant, Walcott, Antonio Benítez-Rojo, and Wilson Harris (to name only a few) have theorized Pan-Caribbeanness as a means to combat the fragmentation wrought by colonial

epistemologies. To support their ideas, these scholars typically point to the "subterranean convergence" (Glissant 66) of Caribbean histories—i.e., shared experiences of (neo)colonization, plantation slavery, and migration—and/or to cultural similarities throughout the region.[10] Such theorizations of Caribbeanness have been hugely influential in Caribbean studies, but they have been slow to alter the practice of literary scholarship about the region and its diasporas. The field remains largely sub-divided by language and nationality, for reasons both practical and political.[11] That the texts I examine in the following chapters are all written in the same language (English), but have been claimed by two distinct subfields of Caribbean study (the Anglophone and the Spanish-speaking) is but one testament to this continued balkanization.

I take a comparative approach in this project both as a response to the problem of balkanization, and because of what I see as the cross-cultural aspirations of the archival impulse. My choice of texts was necessarily informed by my disciplinary training in English-language literature, and by my own linguistic competencies in English and Spanish. However, in their scope and intertextuality, the novels I analyze here gesture beyond the Anglophone and Spanish-speaking Caribbeans toward a sense of connection with the region at large. Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven*, for instance, incorporates epigraphs from Aimé Césaire's *Cahier d'un Retour au Pays Natal* (*Notebook of a Return*

[10] Benítez-Rojo, for instance, focuses on carnival as a Pan-Caribbean practice. Walcott focuses on the "polyglot and indeterminate" nature of all Caribbean societies, imagining the region as a "New World Mediterranean" (Dash 98-100).

[11] The issue of linguistic competency and translation is of course a tremendous practical concern for comparative Caribbean studies. And, as J. Michael Dash notes, "It is perhaps not too sweeping a generalization to state that the tendency to balkanize the Caribbean in terms of . . . language was invariably based on theories of political resistance" (6). This has particularly been the case in the Francophone Caribbean, where choosing to write in French or Créole is as much an ideological decision as it is a linguistic one.

to the Native Land) (1939) and "Autre Saison" (Another Season). Díaz likewise references *Cahier* in *Oscar Wao*. Alvarez's *Salomé* suggests the connections between the Dominican Republic and Haiti. And the complex family lineage traced by Brand in *At the Full* traverses multiple nations and linguistic communities, including the under-studied Dutch and Papiamentu-speaking Caribbean.

The texts I've chosen thus demand a comparative approach. However, I remain conscientious of the potential to unintentionally flatten differences or posit an essential Caribbeanness—pitfalls that have hindered a number of Pan-Caribbean and transnational approaches to the region's literatures.[12] In *Other Americas* (1998), J. Michael Dash develops a blueprint for comparative analyses of Caribbean writing, suggesting that it is necessary to emphasize "multiplicity and heterogeneity," as well as "liminality and indeterminacy . . . for a proper theorizing of that 'delicate tenuity' that Césaire saw as the Caribbean's defining characteristic" (6). In using the archival impulse as the organizing structure of this study, I strive to meet Dash's criteria. My readings necessarily take multiplicity and heterogeneity into account; each text that I analyze imagines an archive composed of materials specific to its characters' lives and cultures, and each archive is deployed to its own unique end. Likewise, as my definition of the archival impulse suggests, this dissertation is premised on accepting historical indeterminacy and recognizing liminal narratives and identities. Finally, in the archive's multi-cultural and multi-linguistic intertextuality, which suggests the ways that the Caribbean converses with itself, and in the impulse's reappearance across multiple diasporic literatures, we can

[12] Négritude and Créolité in particular have come under fire for this, as have efforts to incorporate Anglophone literatures from the Caribbean into the British or commonwealth literary traditions.

perhaps begin to see the "delicate tenuity" described by Césaire and Dash.

While I thus intend *"To retrieve what was left"* to contribute to comparative studies of distinct Caribbean literary traditions, I also intend it to contribute to emerging hemispheric conceptions of the Caribbean and its diasporas. This entails recognizing that, as Glissant suggests, "In one way or another, the Caribbean is the outgrowth of America. The part that breaks free of the continent and yet is linked to the whole" (117). While neocolonial epistemologies ascribe the Caribbean an ancillary status in relation to the rest of the Americas (particularly to the U.S. and Canada), scholars such as Glissant, Dash, and Benítez-Rojo suggest that the "other Americas" of the Caribbean are in fact central to the history and daily life of the hemisphere. It was in the Antilles that the social formations, narratives, and tropes that still shape the New World experience had their beginnings—the islands are where the European imperialist project took hold, where the genocide of indigenous peoples began, where the Trans-Atlantic slave trade manifested most brutally, and where cultural syncretism inspired potent narratives of "first contact" and "melting pots." Benítez-Rojo argues that, "the Caribbean flows outward past the limits of its own sea with a vengeance" (4). This dissertation traces the currents of the Caribbean through the archives imagined by diasporic authors, focusing on the movement of artifacts, narratives, and individuals in order to illuminate how the Caribbean's history flows outward into the history of the Americas at large.

In addition to emphasizing the Antilles' influence on New World ontologies, thinking hemispherically entails recognizing the need to theorize Caribbean identities that aren't delimited by geographic or linguistic boundaries. In the last half of the twentieth

century, large, vibrant Caribbean diasporic communities have emerged in the United States and Canada; the number of Dominicans living in the U.S., for instance, grew from fewer than ten thousand during World War II (Torres-Saillant and Hernández 80) to more than 1.4 million according to the 2010 census. Such demographic shifts indicate, as Edna Acosta-Belén and Carlos Santiago suggest, that Caribbean cultural formations have "become a very palpable presence *in* the United States" and Canada (31, emphasis original).[13] Furthermore, what these two scholars refer to as "*el ir y venir* (the back and forth movement)" of diasporic subjects between the islands and the continent has become increasingly common (Acosta-Belén and Santiago 36). Indeed, each of the authors analyzed in this study have spent significant portions of their lives traveling repeatedly between their islands of birth and their homes in diaspora.

Such transnationality demands expansive, fluid, and multiplicitous conceptions of Caribbean selfhood. The archive—that which makes cultural and historical narratives possible, including narratives of identity—can be an ideal tool for theorizing such transnational selves. Each of the archives imagined in the following chapters incorporates materials whose provenance is not only the Caribbean, but also the United States and Canada. Non-Caribbean artifacts such as U.S. comic books and newspaper clippings, and letters from diasporic centers to family "back home"—and vice versa—suggest the movement of individuals across political and cultural boundaries. What's more, these imagined archives are themselves highly mobile; many are immaterial (i.e. oral) and/or easily transportable (i.e. small family collections). The mobility reflected in both the

[13] Acosta-Belén and Santiago concern themselves solely with Latin@ diaspora in the United States, but I think their observation is more widely applicable to Caribbean diaspora at large.

content and physicality of these archives suggests that Caribbean identities are likewise mobile, circulating throughout the hemisphere.

CARIBBEAN LITERATURE AND/AS HISTORY

In its effort to explore how Caribbean diasporic novels reimagine the region's histories, and how authors deploy those reimagined histories, this dissertation comments on a well-established literary tradition. Fictional re-workings of history are nothing new in the Antilles—as Benítez-Rojo notes, in the Caribbean, history and the novel have long had a "secret wish to exchange places, which brings about an unforeseen kind of coexistence between the two discourses" (261). Within Caribbean literatures, this coexistence has manifested itself in a multitude of ways. Some authors, like Alejo Carpentier in *El reino de este mundo* (*In the Kingdom of this World*) (1949) re-tell well-documented historical events from new perspectives. Others imagine and/or excavate lived experiences that have been elided from official histories—for example, neo-slave narratives such as Brand's *At the Full* (1999) and testimonial novels like Edwidge Danticat's *The Farming of Bones* (1998). Still others, like Walcott in *Omeros* (1990), heeding Glissant's assertion that "the earliest link between a view of history and the urge to write can be traced back to myth" (71), rework Caribbean history in mythopoeic terms. These are, of course, only a handful of the ways that literature and history have commingled in the Caribbean and its diasporas, and multiple iterations of the practice can and do frequently co-exist within the same text.

Blurring the distinctions between history and fiction has traditionally been a

political, as well as an aesthetic, act on the part of Caribbean writers, with two dominant ends in mind. The first is to create counterhistories that resist the epistemic violence wrought on the region by colonization—which claimed that the Caribbean *had* no history—and, later, by totalitarian regimes that silenced dissident histories in favor of state propaganda. Brathwaite describes this tendency among Caribbean writers as an effort to construct "an *alternative* to their imposed and inherited condition [i.e. colonization, political oppression, etc.]" (125, emphasis original). Though Brathwaite offered this description in 1969, the tendency remains prevalent throughout the present-day Caribbean and its diasporic literatures, and manifests to varying degrees in each of the texts analyzed in this dissertation.

A second goal of historical fiction (or fictional history) has commonly been to assert resistant, de-colonized Caribbean identities in the face of forces that would deny or de-value their existence. The nature of these identities has varied dramatically depending on individual writers' political ideologies and understandings of history. Those who desire a unified Caribbean identity to counter colonial interpellations have tended to adhere to what Glissant calls "*the ideal of history*" (79, emphasis original)—i.e., the understanding of history as a means to trace ultimate and unified origins. This tendency is evident in various nationalist movements, and in theories of racial origin such as négritude or mestizaje.[14] In contrast, those who seek cross-cultural connections between the islands and/or the hemisphere tend to abandon the search for origins, instead viewing

[14] I include mestizaje in light of Jafari Allen's work on post-Revolutionary Cuba. He argues that while mestizaje was nominally a celebration of racial mixing, it was in reality a means to deny Afro-Cuban existence and push for the whitening of Cuban society. He writes, boldly, that, "the celebration of mestizaje is the celebration of a black holocaust" (48).

Caribbean history as fragmented and indeterminate, and Caribbean identities as rhizomatic, syncretic constructs, always in the midst of becoming. For these scholars, "one never becomes a wholly Caribbean person; one is always something more or something less, one always falls just short of or just beyond it" (Benítez-Rojo).[15] In the texts I've chosen to analyze in the following chapters, the latter tendency dominates.

While my dissertation is indebted to the genealogies of thought I've briefly sketched out above, it takes a different, albeit adjacent, path. The texts I examine here re-imagine Caribbean histories for the aforementioned political purposes, to be sure. However, by depicting archives and curatorship, they make visible the processes required to create such alternate histories; in doing so, they also make visible the psychic impact of those processes on the Caribbean diasporic subjects who enact them. Exploring the emotional risks inherent in encounters with remnants of the past, these authors look beyond the question of whether or not the Caribbean has histories of its own. They all agree, definitively, that it does. They ask, instead, whether those histories, which are so often a source of trauma and pain, can—or should—be redeemed into narratives of healing and empowerment for Caribbean subjects.

READING THE ARCHIVE AND/AS TRAUMA

Although the "archival turn" in literary and cultural studies is typically traced back to the publication of *Archive Fever* in 1995, scholars in the fields of postcolonial and critical race studies investigated the archive a site of knowledge production,

[15] Walcott and Glissant echo Benítez-Rojo in this formulation.

discursive power, and epistemic violence long before the release of Derrida's work. Indeed, Gayatri Spivak published "The Rani of Sirmur: An Essay in Reading the Archives" (1985)—which theorizes the archive as a colonial technology—a full decade prior to *Archive Fever*.[16] In it, she asks a question that has since been taken up by dozens of scholars: "As the historical record is made up, who is dropped out, when, and why?" (Spivak 270). Her answer is that the colonized (i.e., subaltern) subject is absented from the historical record, emerging in the archives "only when she is needed in the space of imperial production" (Spivak 270). Four years later, in "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe" (1989), Hortense Spillers would come to a similar conclusion about the place of enslaved peoples in written records of the Middle Passage: "this cultural subject is concealed beneath the mighty debris of the itemized account, between the massive logs of commercial enterprise" (69). This refrain—that the archive functions in the service of power and thus limits access to subaltern consciousnesses—has been sounded by later generations of thinkers from multiple sub-fields, including postcolonial studies, critical race studies, and queer studies.

The realities expressed by Spivak and Spillers are daunting, and remain an obstacle to the development of alternate historical narratives. However, in the years since their writing, the limitations imposed by the archive have become the very grounds through which its authority is questioned. The query, "who is dropped out of the archive, why, and when?" prompted scholars to conceive of the archive as a discursive and social practice rather than as an unmediated source of historical knowledge. As Mbembe puts it

[16] This essay is, in many ways, the predecessor of the more widely referenced argument that Spivak articulates in "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988).

in "The Power of Archive and Its Limits" (2002):

> . . . it seems clear that the archive is primarily the product of judgment, the result of the exercise of specific power and authority, which involves placing certain documents in an archive at the same time as others are discarded. The archive, therefore . . . results in the granting of privileged status to certain written documents, and the refusal of that same status to others, thereby judged 'unarchivable.' The archive is, therefore, *not a piece of data, but a status.* (20, emphasis added)[17]

In its emphasis on the human actors behind the archival process, Mbembe's assertion dismantles not only the belief that the archive is unmediated, but also the belief that the archive is a static repository of information. In *The Archive and the Repertoire* (2003), Taylor elaborates on this idea, noting that like any human institution, the archive is vulnerable to "change, corruptibility, and political manipulation. Individual things . . . might mysteriously appear in or disappear from the archive" (19). Such complications of the archive's claims to truth and authority have been widely deployed by scholars seeking to de-naturalize the dominant epistemologies that archives have traditionally supported.

Additionally, over the course of the past decade, scholars have cultivated reading strategies that, as Hartman puts it, reclaim "archival materials for contrary purposes" (*Scenes* 10). Such strategies involve examining the archive for traces that, when probed, might reveal the archivist and/or the lived experiences of subaltern subjects. Ann Laura Stoler, in her examination of colonial records from the Dutch East Indies, describes this process as reading "for discrepant tone, tacit knowledge, stray emotions, extravagant details, 'minor' events" (*Haunted* 7)—in other words, reading for the affective and

[17] Taylor echoes Mbembe: "There are several myths attending the archive. One is that it is unmediated, that objects located there might mean something outside the framing of the archival impetus itself. What makes an object archival is the process whereby it is selected, classified, and presented for analysis" (19).

informational excess of the archive, which can become the source of alternate histories. Along with this change in *how* the archive is read, scholars, particularly those in African Diaspora and queer studies, have expanded *what* is read as archival. Hartman argues for elevating to the level of archive "forms of knowledge and practice not generally considered legitimate objects of historical inquiry or appropriate or adequate sources of history making" (*Scenes* 11). She and a multitude of other scholars thus read such "illegitimate" materials alongside written archival documents in order to complicate received histories.[18] Taken together, these reading strategies de-stabilize both the meaning and the content of the archive—highlighting its contradictions and gaps, and suggesting how it can be made to support multiple historical narratives.

These modes of theorizing the archive and approaching its contents have influenced my own readings of the imagined archives analyzed in this dissertation. However, my analyses are also predicated on an understanding of archives as sites of trauma—in two senses—for Caribbean diasporic subjects. First, the "official" archive exacts a cost on the individual psyche. Heather Love argues in *Feeling Backward* (2007) that, "What happens in the archive is an encounter with historical violence which includes both physical injury and the violence of obscurity, or annihilation from memory" (49). In staging this painful encounter, the archive becomes a source of insidious trauma, inflicting violence in the present by reiterating the devaluation of the Caribbean diasporic subject's humanity and history. Second, the counterarchive, in making visible the historical brutalities that have shaped Caribbean social formations,

[18] M. Jacqui Alexander, for example, pairs traditional historical research with Afro-Caribbean religious practice in order to re-think African Diasporic history.

becomes a site of accretion for the cultural and transgenerational traumas elided by dominant histories. Cvetkovich, in *An Archive of Feelings* (2003), argues that trauma "is part of the documents of civilization that are also the documents of barbarism" (120), and this is no truer than in the Caribbean. New World ontologies and epistemologies are made possible by an ongoing series of violences—a series in which the archive itself must be included. My contention is that the archival impulse, the impulse *for* the archive and *to* archive, is an attempt to grapple with such traumas. I have organized my study into four chapters examining different iterations of the archival impulse, all of which draw different conclusions about how or if historical trauma can be healed.

Chapter 1, "New Maps of Identity," situates the archival impulse as a means of theorizing diasporic identity after the dual traumas of colonization and migration. In this chapter, I analyze two novels by Jamaican-American author Michelle Cliff: *Abeng* (1985) and *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987). I begin with Cliff's work both because of its situatedness in a nascent post-nationalist moment in Caribbean history, and because of contentious debates about the authenticity of the queer, light-skinned Cliff's Jamaicanness. In my reading of these novels, I foreground the identity crises of Jamaican migrant Clare Savage—produced by her mixed race ancestry and her indoctrination by the British colonial school system—focusing on moments in which she collects oral narratives, photographs, or other artifacts. I argue that this collection constitutes a personal counterarchive, through which Clare generates a provisional history of both herself and the Caribbean that rejects interpellation by colonial regimes. Clare's archive ignores geographic and cultural boundaries, incorporating fragments from around the

globe that she links via their emotional significance. I contend that this emphasis on interconnectivity generates a Jamaicanness that is fluid, multiplicitous, and part of a larger post-colonial world rather than delimited by the borders of the nation-state. *Abeng* and *No Telephone* demonstrate how the archival impulse can be used to counter cultural displacement and historical exclusion, thus producing a Caribbean sense of self.

Chapter 2, "Conjuring Doubt" expands my project's purview from the Anglophone to the Spanish-speaking Caribbean diaspora. In this chapter, I suggest that Julia Alvarez's historical novel, *In the Name of Salomé* (2000), echoes and complements the work done by Cliff. Whereas Cliff focused on generating a counterarchive, the Dominican-American Alvarez focuses on working within established archives to make them visible as sites of knowledge production. She dramatizes the processes that determine an archive's meaning in two key ways. First, *Salomé* portrays the minutiae of curatorship. Much of the novel is devoted to protagonist Camila's efforts to decide which of her family's documents should be made public, and where in the Americas they should be housed. In depicting both the codification of the "official" archive and the physical dispersal of its contents, Alvarez, like Cliff, unfixes Caribbean history and identity from essentialisms and from the boundaries of the nation-state, suggesting that dominicanidad (Dominicanness) is a mobile cultural construct. Second, in exploring the documents and artifacts Camila withholds from the public, Alvarez demonstrates how the excesses of the archive can support a multitude of histories, including queer and racialized ones. *Salomé* thus affords populations traumatized by exile, or by the exclusionary policies of the Dominican state—such as homosexuals and Afro-Dominicans—an opportunity to assert

their cultural belonging and imagine a Dominicanidad that is expansive in terms of both geographies and identities.

While my first two chapters examine the archival impulse as a means of redressing traumatic histories, chapter 3, "'I cannot go back to where I came from,'" questions such narratives of redemption. I offer a reading of Dionne Brand's novel, *At the Full and Change of the Moon* (1999), which I consider a powerful rebuttal of work like Cliff's. Whereas Cliff imagines Clare's counterarchive as a source of healing, the Trinidadian-Canadian Brand uses the archival impulse to underscore the indelible aftereffects of slavery on the Caribbean and its diasporas. I focus on her characters' responses to materials typically found in counterarchives of the African Diaspora: family documents, oral histories, memories, and even ghosts. In Brand's work, these materials explain the psychological malaise of her characters without providing catharsis. While individuals such as Eula desperately desire a coherent archive, that desire is thwarted by the scarcity—and in some cases illegibility—of extant records of her family's past. Her archival ambitions only underscore how much of her history as an Afro-Diasporic subject has been permanently lost, and the archive itself becomes yet another source of grief. I contend that Brand's work poignantly demonstrates that the ability to reconstruct and successfully recover from traumatic histories is a privilege; her work suggests that those denied this privilege should not be stigmatized for choosing other coping mechanisms, such as perpetual mourning or willful forgetting. *At the Full* insists that some traumas cannot be healed, only survived—and that in these cases, survival should be considered a form of resistance.

My final chapter, "'Nothing ever ends'" reads Junot Díaz's novel, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007) as a pointed critique of redemptive historical fiction such as that written by Alvarez. In particular, I argue that the Dominican-American Díaz works to undermine metatestimonial fiction—a genre that bears figurative witness to atrocities, often interrogating who is allowed to speak. Metatestimonio's goal is to give voice to the silenced and enact belated justice for victims. I contend that *Oscar Wao* uses the archival impulse to challenge the genre. Throughout the novel, narrator Yunior compiles evidence against Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo (1931-61) in an earnest attempt to record victims' experiences and put an end to their trauma. While Yunior fixates on gaps in this archive generated by the dictatorship, I argue that he is also creating silences. Although he gathers testimony from multiple survivors, their words are not directly reproduced in the text; Yunior's remains the primary voice we hear. The novel thus hints at an absented archive of testimony, suggesting that despite its good intentions, metatestimonio can replicate practices deployed by the regime it denounces. *Oscar Wao* also suggests that not every trauma can be worked through "once and for all." Examining the artwork accompanying the 2007 Riverhead edition of the novel, I contend that in light of *Oscar Wao*'s investment in comic book culture, these images can be read as references to specific comic narratives. The artwork thus invokes another archive—one that I argue starkly underscores the shortcomings of Yunior's project. For example, in depicting Oscar wearing a winged hat, the cover art recalls Marvel super-hero Thor, who is known for fighting the cyclical battle of Ragnarök. The image thus implies that permanently ending the Trujillato's hold on Dominicans is a project doomed to failure.

Instead, *Oscar Wao* suggests that justice is sometimes permanently deferred, and that certain traumas must be confronted again and again.

As a single study, *"To retrieve what was left"* argues that the archival impulse is a means through which authors of the Caribbean diaspora attempt to respond to the region's legacies of historical trauma. In an apt reflection of the Caribbean's complex multiplicity, the forms that the archival impulse takes are diverse, as are the conclusions—at times complimentary, at times diametrically opposed—that these authors draw about the healing potentiality of bringing the past to bear on the present. All, however, attest to the urgency of considering how the after-effects of slavery, colonization, and mass migrations continue to shape life in the New World.

Chapter 1: New Maps of Identity: Michelle Cliff's Clare Savage Novels and Archives of Diaspora

> "Clearly a new moment has emerged that has produced the need for a different kind of remembering—the making of different selves [. . . .] [w]here was my place in this new map of identity? Who were its cartographers? To whom do I flee and where?"
> —M. Jacqui Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing*

Michelle Cliff, like many of her Caribbean literary contemporaries, has spent a good deal of time living in diaspora. Born in Kingston, Jamaica in 1946, she was raised in New York City from ages three to ten (*Land of Look Behind* 59), traveling back and forth between the United States and the island throughout her youth. As a young adult, she went on to pursue an education in London; since 1975, she has lived exclusively in the U.S. and Europe (O'Driscoll 56). In this respect, she is perhaps unexceptional. As Stuart Hall writes in his influential essay "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" (1990), "Caribbean people have been destined to 'migrate' [. . .] continually moving between center and periphery" (239). Indeed, Cliff's life—and the lives of other Caribbean women writers of her generation, such as Jamaica Kincaid, Beryl Gilroy, and Maryse Condé, who have all made homes and careers in diaspora—seem to reflect the economic and social realities of the Antilles. Migration away from the islands for purposes of education, economic opportunity, and political advantage has been a constant throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. However, unlike her aforementioned contemporaries, Cliff's status as an "authentic" Caribbean subject has been highly contested throughout her career.

The most significant example of this questioning appears in Pamela Mordecai and

Betty Wilson's edited collection, *Her True-True Name* (1989), a compilation of works by Caribbean women writers. The book contains numerous pieces by authors living in diaspora—including those who, like Paule Marshall and Rosa Guy, have spent the majority of their lives outside of the Caribbean.[1] Mordecai and Wilson write that despite these authors' limited time in the islands, they "manage in almost every case to retain and articulate in their work a powerful sense of the island place and are able to affirm island culture and living, fraught though it may be with contradiction and weighed down by its history" (xi). In contrast, they consider Cliff's time away from the islands a reason to interrogate her Caribbeanness. In an oft-cited passage from their introduction, they critique Cliff's renderings of Jamaica:

> The only one of the recently published Caribbean writers who does not affirm at least aspects of being in the Caribbean place is Michelle Cliff, who along with Jean Rhys could be regarded as being more in the alienated tradition of a "francophone" than an anglophone consciousness. Personal history perhaps provides important clues: like Rhys, who also felt isolated, Cliff is "white"—or as light-skinned as makes, to the larger world, little difference. Also like Rhys, she went to the kind of school—quite comprehensively described in *No Telephone to Heaven* which promoted the values of the metropole. Like Rhys, she left her island early and never really came home. (Mordecai and Wilson xvii)

It seems clear, given that *Her True-True Name* includes pieces by other authors who similarly "never really came home" and/or went to schools that "promoted the values of the metropole," that what is at stake for the editors cannot be merely geographic residence or an overseas education.[2] Many of Cliff's defenders, and the author herself, have

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[1] Marshall was born in the U.S. and raised in Brooklyn by parents who had emigrated from Barbados. Rosa Guy's family emigrated from Trinidad to Harlem when she was seven years old, and she lived in the U.S. until her death in 2012.

[2] Kincaid and Condé, respectively, come to mind. Kincaid has not lived in Antigua since age seventeen, and Condé attended Paris's prestigious Sorbonne, where she studied English.

suggested that Mordecai and Wilson's critique stems from the author's ability to pass for white.[3] Cliff's light skin certainly seems to play a significant role in their decision to label her work "alienated."

"Alienated" and alienation invoke Frantz Fanon's work on the colonized black consciousness in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952). Although Fanon does not offer a cohesive definition of the term, broadly speaking it refers to an "inferiority complex" that is the combined result of economic processes and "the internalization—or, better, the epidermalization—of this inferiority" (11).[4] In other words, through systemic and internalized racism, the subject is alienated from herself as a black woman and from Caribbean culture. She may also aspire to or desire whiteness, a phenomenon that Fanon labels "lactification" (47). Mordecai and Wilson offer a thinly veiled suggestion that Cliff is guilty of the latter by comparing her works to a novel "harshly condemned by Fanon" for lactification: "the name of her heroine of both *Abeng* and *No Telephone to Heaven*, Clare Savage [. . .] suggests in reverse the meaning of *La Négresse blanche* [*The White Negress*], title of an early francophone novel by Mayotte Capécia" (xvii).[5] Fanon, in addition to labeling Capécia's works "alienated," also claims that she has "definitively turned her back on her country" (n. 12, 53). He perceives this as an unforgivable betrayal, and infamously dismisses her work with hopes that she "add no more to the mass of her

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[3] In an interview with Meryl F. Schwartz, Cliff states that, "I felt I was included in that anthology because they couldn't exclude me, but to put me in they had to make a crack about me. The introduction ends with something like 'not many of us are called Clare Savage,' words to that effect. It was just plain bitchy, if you want my reading of that remark. And it goes back to very old and very painful stuff" (qtd. in Schwartz 290).

[4] Fanon adapts the term from Marx.

[5] Capécia (1916-1955) was a Martinican writer who published two novellas, *Je suis martiniquaise* (*I am a Martinican Woman*) (1948) and *La négress blanche* (1950).

imbecilities" (Fanon n. 12, 53). His hopes were fulfilled—Capécia died in 1955 without publishing again.

Condé comes to Capécia's defense in her essay, "Order, Disorder, Freedom, and the West Indian Writer" (1993), arguing that Fanon's criticisms are predicated on a deliberate confusion of "the *author* and the *object of her fiction*" (131, emphases original). I would suggest that Mordecai and Wilson make the same mistake with Cliff, for although Clare Savage certainly exhibits something akin to Fanon's alienation, the author herself is definitively *not* a proponent of lactification. She has, in fact, dedicated the majority of her career to valorizing Afro-Caribbean culture and history; in her best-known essay, "A Journey into Speech" (1985), she asserts that, "To write as a complete Caribbean woman, or man for that matter, demands of us retracing the African part of ourselves" (*Land of Look Behind* 14). Likewise, although Cliff has (like numerous diasporic authors) openly expressed conflicted feelings about her nation of birth, it is an oversimplification to claim that she has "turned her back" on Jamaica. In her poem "Love in the Third World" (1985), she writes that despite her "killing ambivalence" toward the island, "I bear in mind that you with all your cruelties *are the source of me, and like even the most angry mother draw me back*" (*Land of Look Behind* 103, emphasis added). Cliff has rejected claiming a British or American identity throughout her life, and chooses to travel as a Jamaican (*Land of Look Behind* 12), which suggests a continued emotional and ideological investment in the island.

Mordecai's and Wilson's critique of Cliff is most likely the product of the historical moment, for both they and Cliff were writing in a period of flux for Caribbean

and Caribbean diasporic literatures. As Condé suggests, West Indian writing in the years immediately following independence tended "to provide the reader with a few reassuring images of himself and his land" (134) in order to counter centuries of colonial interpellation. Part of that "reassurance" was the positing of a unified, de-colonized Caribbean identity, which Condé argues is exemplified in movements like négritude, antillanité, and créolité. [6] I think it is also exemplified by Mordecai's and Wilson's interest in writers that affirm "being in the Caribbean place"—a reflection, in the words of J. Michael Dash, of a then-common deployment of "obsessive nativism or nationalist self-affirmation" as a mode of postcolonial resistance in Anglophone Caribbean criticism (9).

As a member of the post-independence generation who is interested in neither rote affirmation, nor in unified identities, Cliff was thus something of an anomaly for the time. Though she remains connected to the Caribbean place, she also insists on acknowledging its "cruelties": its poverty, its racism, and its institutionalized homophobia—the last of which makes her feel that, "as a gay woman, there is no place for me in Jamaica" (qtd. in Schwartz n. 4, 307).[7] And though she recognizes the damage

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[6] The négritude movement, spearheaded by Martinican poet Aimé Césaire and Senegalese poet Léopold Senghor, got its start in the 1920s and remained influential until the middle of the twentieth century. The theory of antillanité was developed by Édouard Glissant in the 1960s. Raphaël Confiant, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Jean Bernabé's *Éloge de la Créolité* (*In Praise of Creoleness*) was published the same year as *Her True-True Name*—1989.

[7] This sentiment has been echoed by later generations of homosexual authors from Jamaica—most notably poet Staceyann Chin. Cliff has written about her experiences with Jamaican homophobia in a number of essays and short stories, including "If I Could Write This in Fire, I would Write This in Fire" (*Land of Look Behind* 57-76). It is important to note, however, that there is a growing body of scholarship that complicates discussions about homophobia in the Anglophone Caribbean. See, for example, Timothy S. Chin's "'Bullers' and 'Battymen': Contesting Homophobia in Black Popular Culture and Contemporary Caribbean Literature" (1997); Denise Noble's work on Jamaican dancehall music, "Ragga Music: Dis/Respecting Black Women and Dis/Reputable Sexualities" (2000); M. Jacqui Alexander's analysis of

done by colonial epistemologies, which have turned Caribbean subjects into "fragmented peoples" (*Land of Look Behind* 14) separated from their own histories and from each other, she refuses to resolve that fragmentation. Instead, she insists on working within it, "producing work which may find its strength in its depiction of fragmentation" (*Land of Look Behind* 14). Simon Gikandi suggests in *Writing in Limbo* (1992) that Cliff's view of fragmentation as both the result of colonization and "as a condition of possibility" (234) makes her unique among Caribbean novelists of the period. This vanguardism is what led me to choose Cliff's works as the starting point of my study. In her writings, I see the emergence of strategies that will be built upon by the later generation of authors analyzed in my subsequent chapters: a deployment of fragmentation not only to express trauma, but also to generate provisional counterhistories and theorize Caribbean identities that do not exclude those who live in diaspora.

Another reason I begin my study with Cliff's writing is that, from the very beginning of her career, her creative works have examined how colonial archives contribute to the fragmentation of the Caribbean—a fragmentation that the later writers I analyze will also attribute to national archives. This thread in Cliff's work is most clearly illustrated by her prose poem "Against Granite" (1985), which evocatively describes the physical space of the colonial archive: "It is a marble building—but like a cave inside. / [. . . .] Archives are spread on the table where she works: complicated statistics of imprisonment; plans of official edifices; physiognomic studies of the type" (*Land of Look Behind* 33). The building's subterranean, marble architecture suggests a crypt, linking the

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the colonial origins of anti-homosexual law in *Pedagogies of Crossing* (2005); and Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley's *Thiefing Sugar: Eroticism between Women in Caribbean Literature* (2010).

space to death. The discourses of punishment and scientific racism "spread on the table" imply whose deaths the archive makes possible—those of countless enslaved and colonized subjects. The poem thus conceives of the colonial archive not as a mere repository of knowledge, but as a weapon by which imperial regimes enacted physical and epistemological violence.[8]

Significantly, however, Cliff goes on to imagine what might happen if the colonized subject becomes the archivist. Throughout the rest of the poem, Cliff envisions a group of black women occupying the colonial archive despite the presence of "border guards" who would "enforce silence":

> Here is where black women congregate—against granite. This is their headquarters; where they write history. Around tables they exchange facts—details of the unwritten past. Like the women who came before them—the women they are restoring to their work/space—the historians are skilled at unraveling lies; are adept at detecting the reality beneath the erasure.
>
> Out back is evidence of settlement: a tin roof crests a hill amid mountains—orange and tangerine trees form a natural border. A river where women can be seen from the historians' enclaves. The land has been cultivated; the crops are ready for harvest. In the foreground a young black woman sits on grass which flourishes. Here women pick freely from the trees [. . . .]
>
> The historians—like those who came before them—mean to survive. But know they may not. They know that though shadowy, the border guards have influence, and carry danger with them. And with this knowledge, the women manage.
>
> And in the presence of this knowledge the historians plant, weed, hoe, raise

[8] Cliff reiterates the violence enacted by colonial archives in her other works, including "A History of Costume," which describes the theft that makes museum collections in the colonial metropole possible: "This meeting place is filled with stolen gold, silver, coral, pearls; with plundered skins, shells, bones, and teeth" (*Land of Look Behind* 39). She appears to concur with Diana Taylor, who argues that such collections make visible "the discrepancy in power between the society that can contain all others and those represented only by remains, the shards and fragments salvaged in miniature displays" (66).

> houses, sew, and wash—and continue their investigations [. . . .] By opening the sutures, applying laundry soap and brown sugar, they draw out the poisons and purify the wounds. And maintain vigilance to lessen the possibility of reinfection. (*Land of Look Behind* 33-34)

I excerpt this extraordinary poem at such length because it foregrounds what I view as the principles that undergird Cliff's approach to Caribbean history throughout her writings. First, it makes clear that although official records have distorted Caribbean histories, that distortion can be challenged. The women's skill at "unraveling lies" and detecting "reality beneath the erasure" suggests what Lisa Lowe argues in "Intimacies of the Four Continents" (2006)—the archive "attests to its own contradictions and yields its own critique" (196). Their ability to cultivate the land around the archive and turn it into a hospitable, fertile place demonstrates that when occupied by Caribbean subjects, the colonial archive can become a site of post-colonial resistance. Second, in the women's exchange of "details of the unwritten past," Cliff argues the necessity of elevating oral documentation to the level of the written in order to construct resistant counterarchives. Finally, the women's ability to reopen and "purify the wounds" inflicted by the past suggests the healing potential of counterhistories—though the fact that the women may not survive, and that the wounds are at risk of reinfection, indicate that healing is a protracted process with no guarantee of success. In this chapter, I explore the implications of these principles for individual Caribbean diasporic subjects via an analysis of Cliff's first two novels, *Abeng* (1984) and *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987).

These two works tell the life story of the aforementioned Clare Savage, a light-

skinned, middle class Jamaican woman.[9] *Abeng* portrays Clare's childhood in pre-independence Jamaica, focusing on her conflicted sense of racial identity. While her similarly light-skinned father, Boy, and the colonial school system encourage Clare to think of herself as white and British, the young girl is drawn to the Afro-Caribbean part of her heritage—represented by her dark-skinned friend, Zoe, and by Clare's mother, Kitty. By the end of the novel, Clare begins to understand the racial and economic privilege granted to her by her skin color, but does not manage to reconcile her conflicted identity. *No Telephone* portrays Clare's life in diaspora, which begins when she moves to the United States with her family as a teenager. As in her childhood, the adult Clare still struggles with her sense of cultural and racial identity. In her search for self, she moves repeatedly between the U.S., Europe, and Jamaica, struggling to feel at home in any of these locations. Ultimately, she claims an Afro-Jamaican identity and returns to her island of birth, where she joins an anti-colonial resistance movement and dies in combat.

This chapter reads *Abeng* and *No Telephone* with an eye toward moments in which Clare, like the women of "Against Granite," becomes an archivist. I argue that such moments function to "de-colonize" Clare, impressing upon her the epistemological limitations and the physical violences inflicted on Caribbean subjects by British imperialism. I contend that throughout both novels, Clare is constructing her own personal archive—composed of written documents, historical artifacts, oral narratives, and embodied practices—in order to explain her existence as a diasporic subject. The

[9] While these novels are semi-autobiographical, my approach to Cliff's fiction is not autobiographical. That path is overly simplistic, and one that she herself has repudiated as "diluting and undermining the politics of the narrative" and reducing "the collective to the individual" (*If I Could Write* 57-58).

artifacts in this collection, bound together by their emotional importance in Clare's life, are culled from multiple contexts and geographic locations. As a result, Clare's archive demands that we supersede the boundaries of the nation-state in order to see connections between the people of Jamaica and other African Diasporic populations, and in order to imagine a Jamaicanness that can incorporate the diverse, sometimes conflicting parts of the diasporic self. Ultimately, I conclude that Cliff's novels demonstrate how the archival impulse can be used to counter histories of colonization, displacement, and exclusion that traumatize Caribbean diasporic subjects.

CARIBBEAN IDENTITIES AND CROSS-CULTURAL ARCHIVES OF FEELING

As a product of the British colonial school system and an Anglophilic father who obsessively traces his lineage back to the "mother country," Clare is raised from birth to believe that the Caribbean has little history of its own, and that what history it does have is of minimal consequence. Very early in *Abeng*, that message is crystallized in a lesson she hears at St. Catherine's School for Girls, which insists that Jamaican history "was slight compared to the history of Empire. The politics of freedmen paled beside the politics of the commonwealth" (30). Like children throughout the British colonies, Clare falls victim to what is known among post-colonial critics as the daffodil gap—defined by Helen Tiffin as "the gap between the lived colonial or post-colonial experience and the imported/imposed world of the Anglo-written" (n. 7, 920).[10] Though Clare is surrounded

[10] The phenomenon is named after William Wordsworth's "Daffodils" (1807)—also known as "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud"—which was commonly included in the colonial curriculum. Caribbean authors have often discussed this poem in their work. For example, in his short piece "Jasmine" (1972),

by vibrant Afro-Jamaican culture and traditions, the written history she is expected to learn denies that such culture exists. That schism has dire consequences for Clare's conception of self; as H. Adlai Murdoch notes in his analysis of *Abeng*, being denied knowledge of one's history "means being denied the basis for the articulation, validation, and valorization of an identity" (78). Clare's colonial indoctrination means that she cannot imagine a viable Jamaicanness, yet as she discovers in *No Telephone*, her status as racialized colonial subject means that she will never be considered fully British, either.

In order to escape from the psychic limbo created by the daffodil gap, it is imperative that Clare generate her own Caribbean counterhistory—that she move beyond the messages she has absorbed from her father and from her school textbooks. If she cannot find other sources of information, her "knowledge will always be wanting" (*Land of Look Behind* 14). In "A Journey into Speech," Cliff describes how she developed her own unconventional historiographic practices in order to counter colonial epistemologies: "I strung together myth, dream, historical detail, observation [. . .] I added native language, tore into the indoctrination of the colonizer" (*Land of Look Behind* 16). For Cliff, creating a personal counterarchive comprised of materials written and unwritten, public and private, was necessary for postcolonial resistance and for finding her voice as a Caribbean writer. Throughout *Abeng* and *No Telephone to Heaven*, Clare follows a similar path in order to deal with her traumas as a colonized, diasporic subject. In this section of my chapter, I'll be focusing on items in Clare's personal collection that would

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V.S. Naipaul writes about being forced to memorize and recite this poem despite having never seen a daffodil. Jamaica Kincaid makes a similar complaint in *Lucy* (1990).

typically be deemed "archival": printed texts and images. I'll examine more ephemeral forms of documentation in the following section.

Significantly, many of the physical artifacts in Clare's archive are not Jamaican, in large part because she does not access the national archives, university libraries, or museums in Kingston until the very end of her life. Instead, Clare's personal archive reflects her status as the product of multiple migrations—it is comprised of fragments from a variety of cultural contexts. Rather than collecting these materials based on any preconceived agenda, Clare chooses them because of the powerful affective pull that they exert upon her. I would thus argue that Clare constructs what Ann Cvetkovich calls an archive of feeling. Such archives are attempts to record and make sense of the emotions associated with trauma: "Subject to the idiosyncrasies of the psyche and the logic of the unconscious, emotional experience and the memory of it demand and produce an unusual archive, one that frequently resists the coherence of narrative or that is fragmented and ostensibly arbitrary. Memories can cohere around objects in unpredictable ways" (Cvetkovich 242). For Clare, personal meaning tends to cohere around records/representations of people who have experienced systemic violence or displacement; in gathering such materials, she attempts to understand who she is.

The earliest example of this tendency appears in *Abeng*, when at age twelve, Clare becomes compelled by one of the most documented traumas of the twentieth century: the Holocaust. She is drawn almost obsessively to the story of Anne Frank.[11] Cliff writes that

[11] Anne Frank and the Holocaust are also the subjects of some of Cliff's non-fiction work. See "A Visit to the Secret Annex" (*Land of Look Behind* 104-107) and "Sites of Memory" (*If I Could Write This in Fire* 49-63).

via Anne's story, Clare "was reaching, without knowing it, for an explanation of her own life" (*Abeng* 72). Clare's identification with Anne and her desire for an explanation of Anne's death lead her to conduct a very basic form of research, seeking out all publicly available information on the Holocaust.[12] She reads *The Diary of a Young Girl* (1952) multiple times, attends a screening of the 1959 film adaptation of that work, and scours her school and local libraries for books about the genocide. Although she is unaware of it, the unconscious connection she draws between the Holocaust and life in the African Diaspora is one that many others also made during the post-war period. As Eric Sundquist notes in *Strangers in the Land: Blacks, Jews, Post-Holocaust America* (2005), after World War II, numerous African American authors adapted "the Holocaust as a conceptual framework for reinterpreting both the ordeal of slavery and its legacy in racial discrimination and violence" (5-6). For these authors, the Holocaust provided a language through which to re-claim poorly documented or forgotten traumas, and to seek justice for them. Clare, on a much simpler and smaller scale, likewise utilizes the Holocaust and the story of Anne Frank as a means to understand the injustices that she senses in her own life as a colonized Jamaican—injustices that, as a child, she is only just beginning to grasp.

For Clare, the *Diary* and the Holocaust take on deeply personal meaning; these narratives get bound up in her relationships with her parents, and with the division she senses between the white and black portions of her heritage. This method of reading

[12] While Dominick LaCapra warns against "unchecked identification" with the trauma of others, which can result in a lack of "consideration for others as others" (*Writing History* 28), I don't think that's what Clare is doing with regard to Anne Frank. Instead, I think she is searching for a vocabulary of loss that she does not yet possess.

allows her to glimpse disconcerting truths that she would not have otherwise encountered. Whereas the younger Clare did not "question her father's reading of history" (*Abeng* 10), Boy's explanation of the Holocaust shakes her faith in his worldview for the first time. He argues that the Jews "brought it on themselves. They should have kept quiet" (*Abeng* 73). Given his role as champion of Empire and whiteness throughout the book, readers might find his anti-Semitic response unsurprising, but this is Clare's first glimpse at his—and by extension the British Empire's—"culpability" (*Abeng* 76) in the type of systemic prejudice that makes genocidal violence possible. Her research likewise leads her to sense the dangers of her mother's remoteness and defeatism, namely that Kitty's silences "can become complicity" (*Abeng* 76) in the oppressive regimes touted by Boy. Perhaps most significantly, she comes to connect the suffering of European Jews with the suffering of dark-skinned Jamaicans and understands, on a very basic level, both the "unfairness and cruelty" of her privilege as a light-skinned person and her own guilt for being "glad of the way she looked" (*Abeng* 77). For the first time, Clare intuits the brutality of the colonial system, and why she is simultaneously an insider and an outsider in her nation of birth.

Admittedly, her age makes her grasp of these problems rudimentary, and she is unprepared to deal with the consequences her discoveries would have on her relationships with her parents. Her research becomes a source of guilt and discomfort for her: "Now—she felt only vaguely that she was doing something wrong. To find out why Anne Frank had died had become connected to a forbidden act" (*Abeng* 76). Ironically, she hides her dog-eared copy of the *Diary* between two canonical British works portraying Otherness:

Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* (1883), set partially in the Caribbean, and Sir Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe* (1820), with its portrayal of persecuted English Jews Isaac and Rebecca (*Abeng* 68). The *Diary*'s position within Clare's personal archive metaphorically exposes the lie of British imperialism and the civilizing mission, gesturing towards the at times genocidal violence that buttresses such projects. While the young Clare is unable to make this connection, Anne Frank's story provokes questions that she will return to throughout her life.

We can see this quite clearly as Clare continues to construct her archive in *No Telephone*; one of the very first physical artifacts she is drawn to in this novel again raises the issue of race and racist violence. As a teenager, Clare is left reeling by the Savage family's migration to New York City and the Jim Crow racism of the United States. In 1963, the seventeen-year-old Clare becomes engrossed by news coverage of the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama. She fixates in particular on a photograph of one of the victims, printed in the *New York Daily News*:

> A girl in a coffin, open. Girl, coffin, platform, all draped in fine white cotton, like a delicate mosquito netting protecting her from the tiny marauders of a tropical night. A curtain to protect onlookers from the damage. The veil identified in the caption as "one of the victims of Sunday's bombing." There she was—still and whole. As if sleeping, the undertaker might have advertised. Clare wondered what the veil hid, then was ashamed for wondering, confusing the sleeping pose with resting in peace. She cut the picture from the paper and put it in a celluloid pocket in her wallet—to glance at it even when they buried the President and she and her father watched the television nonstop for three days. (*No Telephone* 101-102). [13]

That Clare puts the photograph in her wallet—a space typically designated for

[13] This photo was taken by Danny Lyon (b. 1942), a member of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), and a well-respected photographer of the Civil Rights movement. Three of the victims—Denise McNair (age 11), Addie Mae Collins (age 14), and Cynthia Wesley (age 14)—were buried in a mass funeral. The fourth victim, Carol Robertson (age 14), was buried in a private family funeral. It's unclear which girl is pictured in Lyon's photograph.

identification documents and family photos—indicates that as with the *Diary*, the meaning she attaches to this image is simultaneously personal and historical. Her fixation on the veil, and her guilty desire to see what it conceals, suggest that it functions as the punctum of the photograph for Clare—that detail which "rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me" (Barthes 26). As Roland Barthes argues in *Camera Lucida* (1980), this affective "pricking" or "wounding" generates an intensely personal reading of the image, and simultaneously animates that image so that the viewer seeks the "life external to [the] portrait" (57). For Clare, this photograph prompts an interrogation of her own place in the New World's history of racial violence.

What seems to "prick" Clare about the veil is its simultaneous potential to reveal and conceal—a duplicity that reflects her own biracial heritage, and her negotiation of the rigidly binarized system of racial classification in the United States. Whereas light skin and money were enough to guarantee the Savages' privilege in Jamaica, the U.S.'s unspoken one-drop rule makes their status far more tenuous. Yet Boy insists on staying, encouraging Clare to conceal her African ancestry and to turn a blind eye to racial injustices, telling her that, "'[w]e are not to judge this country'" (*No Telephone* 102). In encouraging her to pass as white, he counsels her in *not being seen* and in *not seeing*. Yet

Figure 1: *Funeral for one of the four girls killed in the KKK bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church* (1963).
© Danny Lyon/Magnum Photos

just as the veil haunts the photograph with the possibility of making visible that which it hides, Boy's strategies are also haunted by the threat of visibility; he and Clare are "sighted" almost immediately by a public school administrator who recognizes that they are passing (*No Telephone* 99). Similarly, his lessons about "[b]lending in" (*No Telephone* 100) counter-act his admonitions that Clare ignore U.S. racism. In order to blend in, she must become acutely self-conscious about how others see her—or how they *might* see her. She thus of necessity develops the racialized "second sight," or double consciousness, described by W.E.B. Du Bois in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903). Du Bois metaphorizes this kind of seeing as "The Veil" (2); the fact that it is brought into being for Clare by the veil in the photograph therefore seems appropriate.

The image forces her to see in a way that she was not required to in Jamaica—to recognize the brutality of systemic racism, and that she, like the girl in the picture, is vulnerable to violent oppression for the simple fact of being of African descent. The photo thus becomes a site of cathexis for Clare's complicated feelings about her own race. Her repeated need to see the image, and to speculate about what is hidden behind the concealing veil, is a sharp break from Boy's colonial ideologies. It is perhaps unsurprising then, that upon discovering the photo in Clare's wallet, Boy takes it from her, telling her "You must not ponder these things so" (*No Telephone* 102). Despite this admonition, the image stays "in her mind" (*No Telephone* 102)—remaining a part of her personal archive and indicating that, contrary to her father's teachings, Clare has at least tentatively begun to claim her African ancestry, and to view herself as part of a transnational African Diaspora.

While the photograph thus signifies a starting point for Clare's sense of herself as an Afro-Caribbean subject, a second set of artifacts from the colonial metropole will prepare her to fully develop that identity. As aforementioned, like many members of the (former) Empire, Clare has been trained to view herself as British; it is thus no surprise that as a young adult, Clare chooses "London with the logic of a creole. This was the mother-country" (*No Telephone* 109). However, Clare's experiences with racism in Britain soon lead her to question that choice—a questioning that reaches its apex during a happenstance visit to Pocahontas's burial site at the church of St. George, located in a

town on the south bank of the Thames called Gravesend.[14]

The site, which is open to the public, is marked by a bronze statue of Pocahontas, commissioned by "the Colonial Dames of America [. . .] in loving memory of their countrywoman" (*No Telephone* 136).[15] That the statue and the related materials Clare encounters in the church—including two stained glass windows and an informational pamphlet—are explicitly intended as memorials is significant. As Marita Sturken argues in *Tangled Memories* (1997), memorials are designed to commemorate the "defeated dead" who gave their lives "for a particular set of values" (47). This description becomes especially evocative when applied to the Pocahontas memorial, given the long tradition of portraying Native Americans as defeated and/or vanishing within U.S. history and popular culture.[16] Such depictions typically view the genocide of Native peoples as a necessary consequence of fulfilling Manifest Destiny. The language utilized to describe Pocahontas in the pamphlet that Clare takes from the memorial site certainly appears to buttress this version of U.S. history: "'Friend of the earliest struggling colonists, whom she nobly rescued, protected, and helped'" (*No Telephone* 137). The memorial implies that what *really* matters is not that Pocahontas's home was invaded, or that she died an untimely death at age twenty. What matters is that she helped to make colonization—and by extension, the British Empire and the modern United States—possible. Pocahontas is

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[14] This is an approximate burial site, as Pocahontas "died in a ship anchored off Gravesend [. . . .] [i]t is popular belief her remains are buried in the vicinity of the church, having been removed for reburial after the previous church was destroyed by fire" (Pilgrim).

[15] The Colonial Dames of America, according to their website, were founded in 1890, and their primary goals are "education of American history and historical preservation" (*Colonial Dames*). The Dames are deeply invested in their status as descendants of those who "held positions of leadership in the Thirteen Colonies" (*Colonial Dames*).

[16] A tremendous amount of scholarship has been published on this issue, but the seminal work on the subject remains Richard Slotkin's exhaustive study, *Regeneration through Violence* (1973).

thus painted as a willing participant in the justified destruction of her people's way of life.

Figure 2: Statue of Pocahontas at St. George's Church, Gravesend, United Kingdom.

In the years since the publication of *No Telephone*, St. George's has created a website that expands upon the information contained in the pamphlet Clare reads. This site provides a written overview of Pocahontas's life and historical significance, composed by "Colin Pilgrim—Rector in 1975" (Pilgrim), along with paintings of the young woman.[17] While the website's text provides a fuller picture of Pocahontas's life than does the Colonial Dames' pamphlet, it still tends to reiterate the narrative Clare reads. Pilgrim focuses largely on Pocahontas's status as a friend to British settlers—the

[17] When I first visited the site in 2010, it included an educational video comprised of interviews with scholars and Pocahontas's descendants, but the link for that video is now defunct.

woman who rescued John Smith and "saved other lives by giving warning of Indian attacks." He mentions that she was briefly held hostage by the British, and that she died a premature death from tuberculosis, "to which the Indians appeared rather prone" (Pilgrim), but he offers little insight into her emotional life and the traumas she likely experienced as a result of colonization and displacement.

The memorial thus enforces imperialist and patriotic narratives. Yet as Sturken notes, memorial sites can support conflicting meanings, with readings depending heavily upon the viewer and the context in which the viewing takes place.[18] For Clare, the memorial strikes a much different affective chord than that intended by either the Colonial Dames or Pilgrim. Like the women of "Against Granite," Clare senses the lies and erasures perpetrated by the memorial, reading it as a site of a tragic cultural memory—the memory of Pocahontas as a colonized and displaced subject, who was "tamed, renamed Rebecca" (*No Telephone* 136) and died in a strange land, half a world away from her people. Clare finds herself deeply unsettled by the statue: "Something was wrong. She had no sense of the woman under the weight of all these monuments. She thought of her, her youth, her color, her strangeness, her unbearable loneliness. Where was she now?" (*No Telephone* 137). Within Clare's personal archive, the "wrongness" of this memorial functions to destabilize her perception of herself as British and of the colonial metropole as a haven for individuals like herself. The visit to Gravesend initiates her break with Great Britain, and her coming to post-colonial consciousness—it is no

[18] She sites, for example, varied readings of the Vietnam Memorial Wall in Washington, D.C.: "The politics of memory of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial shifts continuously in a tension of ownership and narrative complexity" (81).

coincidence that she leaves the country a few months later.

Clare's cross-cultural archive of feelings thus helps her to begin describing her own sense of trauma as a colonized, diasporic subject, and to reject the oppressive racial narratives she has absorbed throughout her life. By the time she returns to Jamaica, it seems that she has completed those processes and is ready to claim an Afro-Jamaican identity. She does this, as I will discuss in the conclusion of this chapter, by visiting the archives in Kingston to increase her awareness of Afro-Jamaican history and culture. However, the fact that non-Jamaican artifacts have such an important role in her process of identity-formation is hugely significant. As Jocelyn Fenton Stitt notes, Cliff's work "enters into the difficulty of forming a multi-cultural nation, as in Jamaica's motto: 'Out of Many, One People'" (67). In examining the multi-cultural, diasporic provenance of Clare's physical archive of feelings, Cliff poses a challenge to monolithic conceptions of Caribbean selfhood. She refuses to reiterate the nationalist tropes that were still prevalent at the time of these novels' publication, which valorized "proper folk knowledge" (Fenton Stitt 58) as the sole means to claim an authentic Caribbean identity. While the unwritten archives discussed in the next section of this chapter suggest that folk knowledge is indeed important to Clare's formation of self, her transnational archive of feeling demonstrates that the process of claiming Caribbean identity necessarily involves drawing from the multitude of cultural influences that make up diasporic subjects.

ARCHIVAL INTIMACIES AND NON-NORMATIVE SEXUALITIES/GENDERS

While the collection described in the previous section of this chapter is comprised

of materials typically considered archival (i.e., written texts, photographic images, physical objects), in this section I'll be examining what I label archival intimacies in both *Abeng* and *No Telephone*. I develop this concept from the works of Cvetkovich and Sarah Ahmed. In *An Archive of Feelings* (2003), Cvetkovich argues that, "The archive of feelings is both material *and immaterial* [. . .] resisting documentation because sex and feelings are too personal or ephemeral to leave records" (244, emphasis added). Ahmed, in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004), conceives of the archive as "an effect of multiple forms of contact, including [. . .] everyday forms of contact (with friends, families, others)" (14). Both scholars concur with Cliff's assertion that non-written forms of documentation should be considered archival; both also suggest that bodies and interpersonal relationships can generate knowledge. Accordingly, I use the term archival intimacy to designate a dynamic established between two people in which cultural information circulates verbally, as well as through embodied practices like touch, sex, and healing. Cliff's novels suggest that such intimacies are a vital means of accessing Afro-Caribbean history and de-colonizing Caribbean spaces.

As one might expect, there have already been a number of studies arguing the need to consider non-written forms of knowledge in *Abeng* and *No Telephone*. Such readings have tended to take a feminist bent, focusing on the transmission of Jamaican folk culture from mothers to daughters, grandmothers to granddaughters. Kaisa Ilmonen, for instance, argues that in *Abeng*, "an Afrocentric mythology and an ethnically Caribbean past are mediated through the female figures. Moreover, this mythological past is essentially female—it is carried by women" ("Rethinking" 117-18). Jennifer

Thorington Springer concurs, claiming that older women are "the keepers of Caribbean myth" (46). For these and multiple other scholars, the most significant oral archives in *No Telephone* and *Abeng* are those that arise from Clare's matrilineage—particularly from Clare's mother, Kitty.[19]

There are indeed moments throughout both *Abeng* and *No Telephone* that illustrate very clearly the wealth of knowledge Kitty possesses about Afro-Jamaican tradition. For instance, in the first novel, we learn that as a girl Kitty "had studied with the old women" who lived around her mother's farm, learning the art of healing: "Kitty knew the uses of Madame Fate, a weed that could kill and that could cure. She knew about Sleep-and-Wake. Marjo Bitter. Dumb Cane [. . .]" (*Abeng* 53). The old women also teach Kitty traditional songs in Coromantee—the language of Jamaican slaves and Maroons.[20] In *No Telephone*, we see more evidence of Kitty's knowledge about the history of Caribbean slavery, some of which she shares with Clare: "her mother had told her of the slaves. Her people. Yes. And their sometimes enthusiasm for death. They ate dirt, Kitty told her, when this life became too much for them. And who could blame the poor souls, she continued, who could blame them indeed" (*No Telephone* 174). These moments of sharing between mother and daughter are powerful, but they are infrequent.

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[19] See, for instance, Antonia MacDonald-Smyth's *Making Homes in the West/Indies* (2001); William Tell Gifford's *Narrative and the Nature of Worldview in the Clare Savage Novels of Michelle Cliff* (2003); Carole Boyce Davies' "Writing Home: Gender and Heritage in the Works of Afro-Caribbean/American Women Writers"(1994); Jennifer Smith's "Birthed and Buried: Matrilineal History in Michelle Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven*" (2009); and Monika Elbert's "Retrieving the Language of the Ghostly Mother: Displaced Daughters and the Search for Home in Amy Tan and Michelle Cliff" (2007).

[20] The moniker "Maroon" comes from the Spanish cimmarón, a term used to describe wild cattle as well as runaway slaves. *The Dictionary of Jamaican English* (2002) notes that the majority of Jamaican Maroons came from the Gold Coast of Africa, specifically a region near the town of Coromantee. As such, their language became the dominant language of Maroon communities on the island (131). Coromantee is still spoken by some individuals, but it has become increasingly rare. Cliff calls it "a tongue barely alive" (*No Telephone* 106).

Kitty for the most part withholds her knowledge of Afro-Jamaican culture from Clare, encouraging her daughter to identify with Boy's white heritage. Yet for scholars invested in matrilineage as a means for Clare to develop a Jamaican identity, Kitty's reticence is of little consequence. William Tell Gifford, for instance, claims that although Clare does not have complete access to her mother's knowledge, "By showing how much Clare adores her mother and how much Kitty mirrors her daughter, the narrator makes it logically conceivable that Clare would trace her mother's footsteps" (99). In other words, despite her distance, Kitty inspires the adult Clare's search for her Afro-Jamaican inheritance.

While I do not wish to deny the powerful influence Kitty has on Clare's conception of herself as a Caribbean subject, I do want to suggest that this is but one example—and in some ways the most problematic—of the archival intimacies in these novels. I am cautious about privileging the matrilineal because it fits too neatly within the nationalist iterations of identity that Cliff seeks to trouble. Indeed, as Fenton Stitt notes, black nationalist texts have historically positioned "the figures of the mother and grandmother as sources of identity" (54-55). Such ideologies envision the family as the site of biological and cultural reproduction, in which authentic identities are forged. However, the most meaningful archival intimacies in *Abeng* and *No Telephone* occur outside the structures of the nuclear family, in Clare's romantic entanglements—none of which, I contend, are strictly heterosexual.[21] This is significant because, as Cvetkovich notes, "[q]ueer or nonnormative forms of cultural reproduction" often lead to "new forms of public culture" (122). It is also significant in light of Jamaica's well-documented lack

[21] I also classify Kitty's relationship with the old women as a non-biological archival intimacy, which suggests yet another permutation of the form.

of legal protections for homosexual and non-normatively gendered subjects, and the lingering perception—voiced by thinkers as influential as Fanon—that homosexuality is exogenous to Afro-Caribbean cultures.[22]

I argue that the new cultural form that emerges from Clare's archival intimacies is a post-colonial Jamaicanness that is inclusive of diasporic subjects such as herself, and that suggests the centrality of non-normative genders and sexualities to the formation of Caribbean identities. While such genders and sexualities fall under the category of "queer" in the U.S., I avoid imposing that designation on Cliff's work in order to acknowledge, as Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley puts it in *Thiefing Sugar* (2010), that "*queer* is only one construction of nonheteronormative sexuality among many—and that listening to other languages, and others' historically specific sexual self-understandings, is crucial to broadening the field" (Loc. 127-30, emphasis original). Accordingly, I describe Clare's archival intimacies either in terms provided by Cliff herself, or using terms such as "same-sex," "homosexual," and "non-normative," which, though imperfect, are burdened with fewer culturally-specific meanings.

The earliest example of a non-matrilineal archival intimacy in the novels is Clare's friendship with Zoe in *Abeng*. This pairing is notable for its stark differences of class and color: Clare is light-skinned and middle class, and Zoe is the dark-skinned daughter of a market-woman. [23] The two only see each other when Clare visits her grandmother's farm during the summers, but despite that obstacle, a strong emotional

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[22] See chapter six, note 44 in *Black Skin, White Masks*.

[23] This pairing recalls Antoinette Cosway's friendship with Tia in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), a novel to which *Abeng* has often been compared. Ilmonen also suggests that the pair resembles Sula and Nell from Toni Morrison's *Sula* (1973) ("Creolizing" 187).

bond develops between the girls. Their time together becomes "their real world—their true plane of existence [. . .] when all other things fell outside" (*Abeng* 96), and Clare develops "swift and strong feelings" for her friend (*Abeng* 126). Their youth and naïveté—they meet as pre-teens, and are separated by age twelve—keep this relationship from becoming explicitly sexual.[24]

However, there are numerous passages that suggest an erotic undercurrent to their bond. The most obvious occurs in their penultimate encounter, when the girls bathe nude in the river near the farm: "The two girls closed their eyes against the rise of the sun to noon overhead and touched hands. Brown and gold beside each other. Damp and warm. Hair curled from the heat and the wet. The warmth of the sunlight on their bodies—salty-damp" (*Abeng* 120). Clare, swept up in her feelings, "wanted to lean across Zoe's breasts and kiss her," but before she can do so a cane cutter startles the pair from their reverie (*Abeng* 124). This moment, though ephemeral, is one of potentiality. Brown and gold female bodies coming together in erotic bliss defies the racism and colorism instantiated by British colonial rule, which has historically riven Jamaicans from each other. Furthermore, the fact that the girls' encounter takes place in a rural landscape where folk culture is an integral part of everyday life implies that same-sex desire is neither alien nor antithetical to Jamaican tradition—it is, in fact, "native" to the island.[25] For a fleeting

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[24] Cliff writes that "it would not have occurred to [Clare] to place those swift and strong feelings [. . .] in the category of 'funny' or 'off' or 'queer'" (*Abeng* 96).

[25] Tinsley notes that the man royal ("masculine woman"), who may or may not love other women, has long been a presence in "the context of working-class Afro-Caribbean traditions" in Jamaica (Loc. 137). Although it is outside the purview of my analysis here, Cliff underscores this argument by mirroring Clare and Zoe's narrative with that of imagined historical figures Mma Alli and Inez—a slave woman and a native woman, respectively. Mma Alli performs a "traditional form of Caribbean laying-on-hands healing" ("Creolizing" 182), helping Inez to overcome sexual trauma by bringing her to climax digitally. Ilmonen

instant, the girls' touching hands thus enact a de-colonized, non-heteronormative Jamaicanness.

Significantly, this relationship becomes one of the primary sites of cultural reproduction in *Abeng*. Zoe, drawing on what she's learned from her mother, and from the progressive rural schoolteacher Mr. Powell, frequently tutors Clare in Jamaican folkways. For example, she tells Clare "what Mr. Powell had told her; that Jamaicans were the only island people daring enough to eat the ackee" (*Abeng* 94). She also passes on her knowledge of womanhood, including the mechanics of menstruation and pregnancy—offering Clare knowledge of her own body that the latter's colonial education has ignored. Carole Boyce Davies argues such instances indicate that, "Zoe, though of similar age, functions effectively as elder" for Clare ("Writing Home" 68).[26] However, the novel depicts the exchange of information between the girls as mutual. Clare shares her father's knowledge of "Mayans, Aztecs, and Incas" (*Abeng* 94) with her friend, along with her uncle's newspapers from England. Within the girls' archival intimacy, historically oppositional folk and colonial epistemologies thus intermingle, seemingly with minimal conflict—a mixing that simultaneously troubles imperialist hierarchies which denigrate Afro-Caribbean "superstition," and that undermines nationalist ideologies which claim folk culture as the only appropriate source of identity for Jamaican subjects. Through her erotic bond with Zoe, Clare begins to see that it might be possible to bring the disparate parts of her self (white/black, insider/outsider,

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argues that this narrative "conjures up queer histories and communities to the Caribbean cultural space" ("Creolizing" 183). For further discussion of Mma Alli, see MacDonald-Smythe and Thorington Springer.

[26] MacDonald-Smythe takes it a step further, suggesting that, "Zoe is a maternal substitute for Clare" (52). I dislike this formulation, as it imposes normative structures on what is quite clearly a non-normative bond.

British/Jamaican) together without negating any of them.

While this archival intimacy thus suggests the possibility of a Jamaicanness that is an assemblage of the island's different populations and cultural influences, the friendship's dissolution illustrates the dangers of collapsing that assemblage into a false unity. In Clare's and Zoe's final encounter, the latter imparts a harsh lesson to her friend: outside of their summer idylls, the racial and economic hierarchies of Jamaica reassert themselves violently. Zoe is blunt with Clare about what she foresees in their respective futures: "Dis here is fe me territory. Kingston fe wunna. Me will be here all me life—me will be marketwoman like fe me mama. Me will have fe beg land fe me pickney to live pon. Wunna will go a England, den maybe America, to university, and when we meet later we will be different smaddy. But we is different smaddy now" (*Abeng* 118). Zoe concretizes what Clare sensed abstractly in the *Diary*—that her light skin and money allow her to benefit unfairly from the systems that deprive Zoe. Clare's insistence that she and Zoe are "the same" (*Abeng* 120) denies her friend's lived experiences, and is a form of epistemic violence. Cliff suggests that while the girls can lie together on the riverbank, touch each other, and unite in erotic pleasure, their bodies—and their lives—*must* be recognized as distinct. In other words, this moment illustrates that Clare will need to openly acknowledge her privilege and develop a nuanced coalitional politics in order to claim an Afro-Jamaican identity responsibly.

The complexity of that lesson is too much for the young Clare to grasp, but like the *Diary*, this final encounter with Zoe plants seeds in Clare's consciousness that will take root as she matures. *Abeng* ends with a telling dream sequence:

> [. . .] Clare dreamed that she and Zoe were fist-fighting by the river in St. Elizabeth. That she picked up a stone and hit Zoe underneath the eye and a trickle of blood ran down her friend's face and onto the rock where she sat. The blood formed into a pool where the rock folded over on itself. And she went over to Zoe and told her she was sorry—making a compress of moss drenched in water to soothe the cut. Then squeezing an aloe leaf to close the wound. (165)

Clare's status as aggressor here indicates a subconscious recognition of her own guilt as a beneficiary of the racist colonial system, a dramatic shift from her waking efforts "to absolve herself of blame" (*Abeng* 121). That Clare apologizes and uses herbal medicine (likely learned from Kitty) to heal Zoe foreshadows her later identification with her Afro-Jamaican heritage, and her return to the island, when she will ally herself politically with Jamaica's poor and oppressed—eventually giving her grandmother's farm to a rebel group.

Interestingly, this dream also foreshadows what I consider to be a later archival intimacy in *No Telephone*: the adult Clare's relationship with Bobby, an African American veteran wounded in Vietnam, whom she meets in London after leaving university. Clare notices Bobby because of his injured ankle, and is "[d]rawn to him as a friend; later, lover" (*No Telephone* 145). The two aimlessly travel Europe together, eventually parting ways when Bobby's post-traumatic stress disorder overwhelms him and he abandons Clare in Paris. Scholars have by and large ignored this pairing, I suspect for one of two reasons—the fact that it is heterosexual, and the fact that it takes place away from Jamaica. However, upon closer analysis, it becomes apparent that, like Clare's relationship with Zoe, this is a non-normative erotic bond that contributes to the process by which the protagonist claims a Caribbean identity for herself.

Cliff drops numerous hints that Clare's relationship with Bobby is something

other than—or more than—strictly heterosexual. The first is Clare's fixation on Bobby's never-healing wound, which she takes it upon herself to clean and tend. At one point, she applies aloe juice to his infected ankle in an obvious reenactment of her dream about Zoe. Significantly, Cliff's physical descriptions of the wound are highly suggestive of female genitalia: "the place where brown skin split and yellowness dripped from a bright pink gap" (*No Telephone* 143), "the lips of the wound [might] move closer together almost to join" (*No Telephone* 144). Such details indicate that Clare's desire is marked by an excess of meaning; though she is in a relationship with a man, what appears to attract her to him is not masculinity, but the ways in which he evokes her own same-sex erotic history. This seemingly "straight" relationship is thus haunted by homosexual desire.

A similar excess of meaning characterizes Bobby's sexuality. Clare's aloe-juice ministrations take place in a room decorated with mosaics "illustrating the metamorphoses of Hyacinth and Narcissus. Ovid came back to her [. . .] *locus*, theme of visual representation fitting the place of decoration" (*No Telephone* 144). Hyacinth, or Hyacinthus, a male consort of Apollo, died after the god accidentally struck him in the head with a discus. Inconsolable, Apollo transformed his lover's blood into a flower, effectively preserving the injury forever. Narcissus, of course, is famed for spurning lovers of all genders in favor of his own reflection. As is suggested by Hyacinth's perpetual woundedness, and by Cliff's sly reference to the locus, these images appear to form a "fitting" commentary on Bobby. He is associated not only with Hyacinth's injury, but also with his homosexuality and with Narcissus's non-reproductivity—once again implying that Clare's relationship with him is something other than, or more than, strictly

heteronormative.

This archival intimacy, established through healing touch and erotic touch, records the way that violence is enacted upon and carried in the bodies of African Diasporic subjects. While the recurring infection in Bobby's ankle is a result of his exposure to Agent Orange, what caused the gash that made him vulnerable to infection in the first place is mysterious. Bobby cannot remember how it happened. He offers multiple possible explanations for the wound, but settles on none of them, ultimately claiming that "the only important thing [is] that it would always be his" (*No Telephone* 147). The trauma signified by his injury thus goes unnamed. For Clare and Bobby, however, the wound becomes associated with his race:

> "Sometimes I think I feel for you only because you're wounded . . . Sorry, I am not being agreeable. I promised I wouldn't mention that again. Sorry."
>
> Bobby ignored her lapse. "You mean actually wounded, with a ten-year-old hole in my foot, or . . . because I'm a black man?"
>
> "I mean you're not foreign to me." She evaded him. (*No Telephone* 155)

Their exchange, though brief, is evocative, indicating that for this pair the gash signifies doubly, recording not only the U.S.'s violent incursion into Southeast Asia, but also the injuries associated with being an African Diasporic subject in the New World.

The latter association is not unfounded—and not only because of the fact that Bobby's time in the military was marked by racist abuse from his commanding officers. Like the moment of rupture that was the Middle Passage, the moment in which Bobby's body was violated is disremembered, forever escaping language and making itself known only in its persistent after-effects, i.e. "the concreteness of his broken skin" (*No*

Telephone 145). Likewise, its unceasing purulence recalls the wounds of history that the women in "Against Granite" must drain and guard against reinfection. I would argue that Bobby's injury therefore serves as a physical metaphor for the link between the historical traumas of the Americas and the violence in Vietnam, making apparent what M. Jacqui Alexander observes in *Pedagogies of Crossing* (2005): "within the neocolonial also resides the imperial" (182). Cliff thus suggests the embodied paths by which, under new guises, colonial ideologies proliferate in the present and continue to inflict damage on African Diasporic subjects.

The connection between Bobby's wound and histories of racialized violence is underscored by the fact that it renders *both* members of this archival intimacy non-reproductive. During a pregnancy scare, Bobby counsels Clare to get an abortion for fear of terminal birth defects, a well-documented side effect of Agent Orange exposure. He warns her that, "[i]t entered me. It doesn't end with me" (*No Telephone* 156). Bobby's warning proves accurate, for although Clare miscarries, she develops a "raging infection in her womb" (*No Telephone* 169)—likely a result of the failed pregnancy—that leaves her sterile. Clare's erotic bond with Bobby thus bequeaths her her own un-healable wound. "It" has entered her, too; her wound, like his, is suggestive of historical traumas. Indeed, the lovers' shared infertility invokes the specter of reproductive violence that has marred black life in the New World for centuries—recalling both the reality that, under the conditions of slavery, "the female, like the male, had been robbed of the parental right, the parental function" (Spillers 78), and the twentieth century's history of forced sterilizations in the name of racial hygiene. Like countless African Diasporic subjects

before them, Bobby and Clare are denied control over their own reproductive labor by forces outside of their control. While Clare attempted to position herself as healer, this non-reproductive archival intimacy concretizes the fact that she, too, is in need of healing—that her body, like Bobby's, serves as a record of imperialism's ongoing physical and epistemological violences. Her eventual acknowledgement of this fact will free her from a lingering sense of obligation to her British heritage, clearing the way for her to view herself as part of a larger African Diasporic history.

The final archival intimacy I'd like to consider in this chapter is perhaps the most frequently discussed relationship in criticism about these novels: the adult Clare's bond with Harry/Harriet throughout *No Telephone*. Harry/Harriet, whom Cliff claims as the true "hero/heroine" (qtd. in Schwartz 601) of the novel, is the product of an illicit liaison between a wealthy, light-skinned Jamaican and his dark-skinned maid. Born biologically male, Harry/Harriet identifies as female. Cliff's use of pronouns for this character is fluid, at times feminine, at times masculine, and in some instances a combination of both; I thus follow her example and refer to the character using s/he, him/her, his/her. I refrain from calling Harry/Harriet transgender, both because Cliff never labels him/her such, and because of Rosamond King's observation that the label "originated in and seems to remain most relevant to North American and European contexts" (581-82). Instead, I refer to Harry/Harriet's gender as "unconventional," "non-normative," or "non-binary."

Clare meets Harry/Harriet on one of her trips back to Jamaica, and the two strike up a steadfast friendship. Harry/Harriet corresponds faithfully with Clare when she is in Europe, and in turn Clare makes a point of visiting him/her on each return trip to Jamaica.

S/he eventually becomes an erotic partner for Clare. Upon one of her returns to the island, Clare boldly declares her love for Harry/Harriet, something "she had never said [. . .] to anyone before this" (*No Telephone* 130). Later, during the same visit, the two share a moment on the beach that echoes Clare's encounter with Zoe at the river:

> Harry/Harriet sliced two [coconuts] open with his cutlass, and they poured rum into the sweet water, the mixture dribbling over them. This was but the beginning. Soon they would be covered with mango juice, salt water, and the spicy oil of the meat. Resting from riding the breakers, warmed by their feast and the sun, they lay side by side under a sky thrilling in its brightness. Touching gently, kissing, tongues entwined, coming to, laughing. (*No Telephone* 130)

Like Clare's relationship with Bobby, her pairing with Harry/Harriet, a "male woman who loves female women" (Tinsley Loc. 2451-52), carries an excess of erotic meaning, exploding male/female and homosexual/heterosexual binaries.

Various scholars have discussed this scene, commenting on how its complex erotics are a reflection of the complexity of Caribbean identities. Nadia Elia, for instance, focuses on Harry/Harriet's choice not to undergo sex reassignment surgery, arguing that it reflects "the fate of all Creoles, diasporans and biracials for whom transformation is impossible. The only option available to hybrids is a reconciliation with the various elements that make up their identity, a spiritual healing that gels these elements into viable wholeness rather than fragmentation" (353). I find this reading problematic because it seems to imply that Harry/Harriet must physically transition in order to fully "transform" into a woman, and because Elia's argument that fragmentation must be collapsed into wholeness runs counter to the aesthetics and politics of Cliff's work. Instead, I think Tinsley's beautiful reading of this encounter is far more instructive. She argues that, "[t]hese two figures of racially, sexually complex Afro-Jamaican femininity

wash together here like the sweet and saltwater on their bodies, different forms of a common element whose embrace seems to embody not only Caribbean women loving each other, but the Caribbean loving itself and its own multiplicity" (Loc. 2586-88). I would expand on this only to suggest that Clare's erotic bond with Harry/Harriet is an enactment of Cliff's efforts to "work within fragmentation." In this moment of pleasure on the beach, the disparate fragments of Jamaican identity represented by these two characters are brought into contact, coming together and moving apart in shared pleasure without collapsing into sameness.

As was the case with Zoe, Harry/Harriet's relationship with Clare becomes a site of Jamaican cultural reproduction, although the exchange of information is far more one-sided here. Much has already been written about Harry/Harriet's importance as a cultural mediator; scholarly consensus is that s/he is the individual primarily responsible for Clare's decision to stay in Jamaica and claim an Afro-Jamaican identity.[27] In order to avoid reiterating well-traveled critical territory, I'll thus be focusing narrowly on what I see as the importance of Harry/Harriet's ability, shared by the women of "Against Granite," to merge healing practices and historiographic practices.

Although Clare tried and failed to occupy the role of healer in her previous archival intimacies, in this pairing it is her partner who takes the role on successfully—Harry/Harriet is in fact the one who nurses Clare back to health after the infection that leaves her barren. Cliff describes his/her training thus (at this point, Harriet has chosen to

[27] See, for example, Tinsley's wonderful chapter on *No Telephone* in *Thiefing Sugar*; Ilmonen's "Creolizing the Queer" and "Healing the Traumas of History"; and King's "Re/Presenting Self and Other: Trans Deliverance in Caribbean Texts," and Elia's "'A Man Who Wants to be a Woman."

live fully as female)[28]:

> While Clare had been dragging her ass through parts unknown, as Harriet put it, her friend had been studying the healing practices. At the university and with old women in the country, women who knew the properties of roots and leaves and how to apply spells effectively. How to temper dengue fever, to slow TB, to stop gangrene in its tracks. Some of the old women saw their old knowledge used at the cancer treatment centers for rich Americans, springing up here and there. One old woman, one who kenned Harriet's history, called her Mawu-Lisa, moon and sun, female-male deity of some of their ancestors. (*No Telephone* 171)

This passage is extraordinary for a number of reasons, not least of which is its suggestion that Harry/Harriet's non-binary gender has long-standing and honored precedent in Afro-Caribbean cultural traditions. The old woman's "kenning" and acceptance of Harry/Harriet illustrates Tinsley's assertion that "male women are routinely recognized as 'natural' parts of the Caribbean cultural landscape and occupy recognized places in their communities" (Loc. 2386-87).[29] Cliff thus complicates stereotypes about Afro-Caribbean gender-phobia, and demonstrates that non-normative gender identities are—like Clare and Zoe's same-sex love—"native" to Jamaica.

What is equally fascinating about this passage is its insinuation that what makes Harry/Harriet a successful healer, and a fully realized, liberated Afro-Jamaican subject, is his/her facility as a mediator between archival intimacies and institutional archives. The passage illustrates quite vividly how Harry/Harriet carries information from one type of archival formation to another: from the university, where s/he got his/her medical certificate, to the "old women in the country," and—possibly—back out again, taking the

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[28] Tinsley suggests that, rather than dissolving Harry/Harriet's non-binary gender, it is a sign of Harriet's refusal to live "'split'—fragmented, broken like ancestors under forced labor, lashes, and sexual violence" (Loc. 2612).

[29] She cites "Suriname's male mati, Caribbean Spanish travestí, and the French/Kreyól masisi and macommère" (Tinsley Loc. 2386-88) as examples of this phenomenon.

old women's "old knowledge" to state-of-the-art cancer treatment centers. The old woman's appellation of Mawu-Lisa, meant to describe how Harry/Harriet traverses the boundary between male and female, could therefore just as easily signify his/her ability to traverse the division between written and embodied/oral forms of knowledge.

Clare's archival intimacy with Harry/Harriet ultimately provides a model by which she can, at last, become a successful healer in her own right: a healer of herself, and the traumas that mark her life as a Caribbean diasporic subject. Throughout the novel, Harry/Harriet guides Clare to resistant histories of the Antilles, written and unwritten. For instance, in one of his/her letters to Clare, s/he recommends C.L.R. James's *The Black Jacobins* (1938), which reveals, "the history they [colonial educators] didn't teach us" (*No Telephone* 146). Likewise, in a moment that takes place shortly after the pair's erotic encounter on the beach, Harry/Harriet teaches Clare to recognize the spectral histories located in the island's ruins and canefields:

> "There is a vast canefield right behind us. Less than ten yards from our blessed bodies is cane. Do you know what went on, what happened along those avenues? In the buildings at the center of the piece? I'm not talking about the new landlord's glass house, or the new sugarworks. I'm talking about the ruins [. . . .]
>
> Now, the slave hospital, that is truly something. Built from limestone and brain coral—held together by molasses, you know [. . . .]
>
> T'ink of de duppy in such a place, eh? Dem nuh mus' crash together in de night . . .?" (*No Telephone* 131-32).

As Tinsley notes, these duppies in the cane are the lingering "aftereffects of a chattel system that reduced African-descended bodies to things" (Loc. 3680)—indicating Harry/Harriet's conscious understanding that the violent, unwritten history of the Caribbean continues to shape its present. Harry/Harriet thus articulates a reality that Clare

has sensed throughout her life, but has been unable to vocalize. In Harry/Harriet's historiographic methods, Clare finds a vocabulary with which to describe her lived experiences, and the tools by which to construct her own Caribbean sense of self.

As my analysis here indicates, Clare's archival intimacies have a good deal in common with her archive of feelings. Both are accumulated gradually throughout her lifetime from locations in the Caribbean and in diaspora. Both help Clare to overcome the daffodil gap instantiated by her colonial indoctrination, preparing her to claim a viable Afro-Jamaicanness that is part of a larger post-colonial world, and that incorporates the multiple parts of the diasporic self. However, Clare's archival intimacies are distinct from her physical archive in their ephemerality. Fenton-Stitt has described Cliff's adamant refusal in both *Abeng* and *No Telephone* "to center the narrative on characters with a fixed identity" (67) as a means of resisting the essentialism of Jamaican nationalist ideologies. I would argue that Cliff' archival intimacies suggest how non-normative erotic bonds, by unyoking cultural reproduction from biological descent, are vital to imagining such unfixed identities. Archival intimacies form, dissolve, and re-form as bodies come together and move apart in mutual care and desire—engendering ways of being Afro-Caribbean that are likewise forever in motion, and forever reaching out to others.

CONCLUSION

After Clare recuperates from her illness, she decides to remain in Jamaica permanently. Using the historiographic practices she has learned from Harry/Harriet, she too becomes adept at traversing the boundaries between written and embodied/oral forms

of knowledge. At long last, she has the opportunity to conduct a focused, sustained investigation into Jamaica's past:

> I have educated myself since my return. Spoken with the old people . . . leafed through the archives downtown . . . spent time at the university library . . . one thing leads to another. I have studied the conch knife excavated at the Arawak site in White Marl . . . the shards of hand-thrown pots . . . the petroglyphs hidden in the bush . . . listened to the stories about Nanny and taken them to heart [. . . .] I have walked the cane . . . poked through the ruins [. . .] (*No Telephone* 193)

Clare's research ultimately leads her to join an anti-colonial guerrilla group and begin "teaching children in a secondary school downtown" (*No Telephone* 192). The process she initiated with her cross-cultural archive of feelings and archival intimacies thus culminates with her ability to imagine and claim a Jamaican identity on her own terms.

Although Clare succeeds in liberating herself from colonial epistemologies, at the end of *No Telephone* she dies in a hail of bullets fighting alongside her fellow revolutionaries in the Jamaican bush—a conclusion that has produced divided readings among scholars. Some echo Cliff's assertion in "Clare Savage as Crossroads Character" (1990) that Clare's death allows her to achieve "complete identification with her homeland" (265). Antonia MacDonald-Smythe describes Clare as being "burnt into the Jamaican soil," literally becoming part of the island's landscape (87). Others claim that the ending reflects a political fatalism. Jennifer Smith, for instance, argues that *No Telephone* is marked by "the lack of a future" (144), because the guerilla group is destroyed and Clare leaves no heirs to continue her de-colonizing work. I want to end this chapter with another potential reading of Clare's death—one that hearkens back to the warning and the promise contained in "Against Granite." Like the women in that poem,

Clare has become a historian, skilled at detecting lies and erasures, and at seeking the details of unwritten history. Yet as Cliff makes clear, like those women, Clare is not guaranteed survival; the border guards who "carry danger with them" do not always remain in the shadows.

However, "Against Granite" also illustrates that the re-working of Caribbean histories is a collective and ongoing task—the historians are doing the work of "those who came before them," and as Clare's teaching suggests, it will carry on after them. I would thus agree with Tinsley's reading of *No Telephone*, which argues that the novel marks the beginning of post-colonial liberation, not its ending: "The work of [Cliff's] second novel is neither crossing a magic line nor arriving at an ideal location. Instead, arduously, it is the work of dredging the sea before diving into the wreck, trespassing through cane fields to speak back to ghosts" (Loc. 2730-32). Clare's archival practices in both *Abeng* and *No Telephone* accomplish that dredging, allowing her to begin "to draw out the poisons and purify the wounds" of history. While her death suggests that no one individual (and, I would argue, no one literary text) can complete that healing, her efforts take place within a much larger tradition of Afro-Caribbean women working to generate liberatory counterhistories. The labor of women like Clare and authors like Cliff guards the wounds of history against the "possibility of reinfection" in hopes that they might knit together—leaving scar tissue and the memory of injury, perhaps, but also creating a future in which the injuries of history no longer pain the present.

Chapter 2: Conjuring Doubt: Archive and Nation in Julia Alvarez's *In the Name of Salomé*

"¿Qué es Patria? ¿Sabes acaso
lo que preguntas mi amor?"
("What is Patria? Do you know,
My love, what you are asking?)
—Salomé Henríquez Ureña, "Qué es Patria" [30]

"Latin America, like the novel, was created in the Archive."
—Roberto González Echevarría, *Myth and Archive*

In a short piece from her nonfiction collection *Something to Declare* (1998), Dominican American novelist Julia Alvarez describes an extraordinary encounter with highly esteemed Dominican poet Aída Portalatín (1918-1994) at a gathering of the Caribbean Studies Association in Santo Domingo. Alvarez writes that, "Doña Aída embraced me, but then in front of the mikes, she reamed me out. 'Eso parace mentira que una dominicana se ponga escribir en ingles. Vuelve a tu país, vuelve a tu idioma. Tú eres dominicana.' ('It doesn't seem possible that a Dominican should write in English. Come back to your country, to your language. You are a Dominican')" ("Doña Aída" 171). Although Doña Aída calls Alvarez dominicana, her statement implies that this is a conditional appellation—Alvarez, though she may be Dominican, is only fully dominicana *if* she writes in Spanish, and *if* she lives on the island.

Doña Aída's statement, though well-meaning, highlights the problematic place that Dominican Americans like Alvarez occupy in formulations of dominicanidad (Dominicanness).[31] Remittances sent to the island from those who migrated north account

[30] Translation by Julia Alvarez.
[31] I borrow the term dominicanidad from Carlos Ulises Decena.

for a huge portion of the Dominican Republic's economy—some $3.2 billion in 2012 alone (Inter-American Development Bank). However, migrants who return to the island are often viewed with suspicion. In "The Tribulations of Blackness: Stages in Dominican Racial Identity" (2000), Silvio Torres-Saillant describes this phenomenon:

> Today, a virtual consensus among public opinion sectors of the Dominican Republic regards return migrants as a menace to the health of Dominican society, though the antipathy and rejection which meets the Dominican diaspora in the homeland may actually conceal a timorous acknowledgment of the diaspora's power to influence mainstream Dominican society. (1109)

This "antipathy and rejection" toward those in diaspora suggests that conceptions of dominicanidad are still very much bound to the borders of the nation-state, and dependent upon notions of cultural authenticity. Alvarez, however, has long resisted such formulations.

She refuses the binary that Doña Aída implies between English and Spanish, between diaspora and nation, insisting on her status as a "hyphenated person" (qtd. in Rosario-Sievert 33) and using her writing in order to map "a country that's not on the map" ("Doña Aida" 173). This "mapping" has typically taken the form of a critical engagement with Dominican (and to a somewhat lesser extent, U.S.) national history. Eschewing what David Eng calls "the continual political rehearsal of history as the way-it-really-was" (188)—i.e., "official" history—Alvarez's novels present history as neither static, nor a matter of rote facticity. Instead, as Lucía Suárez notes: "She directs us [. . .] to the power of a certain sensation, a far-off, enigmatic memory. This memory [. . .] [is] based on the unknown and reconstructed from the possible past" ("Anxiety" 121). In other words, Alvarez's texts engage with what Eng calls the "what might have beens"

(59) of the past in order to think Dominican history, and by extension, imagine Dominican identity outside of the nationalist terms that have tended to define dominicanidad.

In my previous chapter I discussed how Michelle Cliff's novels imagine a counterarchive for Clare Savage as a means of theorizing a post-colonial, diasporic Caribbeanness. Like many Afro-Caribbean novelists, Cliff gathers historical fragments and oral narratives to combat silences within written records—a practice necessitated by histories of slavery and imperialism. I continue my study with Alvarez in order to examine a possibility hinted at in Cliff's work, but not thoroughly developed: that histories of Caribbean nationalism might *also* necessitate fictional re-imaginings of the archive. Throughout her career, Alvarez's novels have often tended to work within established archives related to Dominican national history, exposing those archives as sites of knowledge production. Using Alvarez's novel *In the Name of Salomé* (2000) as an example, I will explore the ways that archives linked to the nation-state can be constructively appropriated in order to counter narrow conceptions of national history and identity, thus allowing for more inclusive and fluid conceptions of Caribbeanness.

Salomé is a historical novel that fictionalizes the lives of two influential Dominican women: Salomé Henríquez Ureña (1850-1897), famed poetess of the Republic, and her daughter Camila (1894-1973). The book details the women's lives utilizing two distinct narratives. Salomé's is set against the backdrop of the Dominican Republic's struggle to become an independent, modernized country, beginning in 1856

and ending with Camila's birth in 1894.[32] In this roughly forty year span, she rises to fame as la musa de la patria (the muse of the nation), marries physician and future Dominican president Francisco Henríquez y Carvajal (1859-1935), gives birth to four children, and helps to found the first girls' secondary school on the island. In contrast, Camila's narrative coincides with two particularly dark periods in Dominican history—the U.S. occupation (1916-1924) and the bloody reign of dictator Rafael Trujillo (1931-61)—and moves backward in time from 1960 to 1897, taking place almost entirely in diaspora. At the "beginning" of her story, while preparing to leave her job at Vassar College in order to join the Cuban revolution, Camila is tasked with curating the family archive. As we move "forward" through her narrative, we see her life as an exile and academic in the United States, her feminist work in pre-revolution Cuba, her studies at the University of Minnesota during WWI, her childhood in Cuba, and finally "end" with Salomé's death from tuberculosis and the family's flight from the Dominican Republic. The novel concludes with an epilogue that depicts Camila returning to her country of birth just prior to her death in 1973.

Salomé is useful to my project for two primary reasons. First, it embraces what Ann Laura Stoler calls a view of "archiving as process" ("Colonial Arts" 87)—a process that is fraught with relations of power and marked by moments of "uncertainty and doubt" (*Archival Grain* Loc. 206-11). I argue that Alvarez uses the Henríquez Ureña

[32] The Dominican Republic during Salomé's lifetime was highly unstable. Post-independence (1850), there was constant domestic infighting for political supremacy, and a succession of kleptocratic governments bankrupted the state. Compounding matters were the threats of invasion from Haiti, and annexation by Spain or the United States. These factors made it exceedingly difficult for the Dominican Republic to develop economic and cultural infrastructures—a weakness that would be exploited by the United States, who occupied the country in 1916 in order to "stabilize" it. For more detailed information, see Frank Moya Pons's exhaustive study *The Dominican Republic: A National History*.

archive to expose the means by which national histories are constructed, and to speculate about the "what-might-have beens"—those dead ends, failures, and fragments excised from official accounts. Second, *Salomé* destabilizes the temporality of the Henríquez Ureña archive, divorcing it from the linear accounts of national history that it has been used to buttress. Instead, Alvarez imagines archives as occupying what Antonio Benítez-Rojo calls the "pendular present" (251) of the Caribbean, in which seemingly incommensurable temporal moments become linked. The effect of these strategies is to unsettle nationalist visions of dominicanidad by suggesting that cultural identity is a mobile and multiplicitous project rather than the realized telos of a singular progressive narrative. In suggesting this, Alvarez attempts to make room within dominicanidad for black, diasporic, and homosexual subjects.

HISTORIES AND HEROINES: THE WOMEN BEHIND ALVAREZ'S HISTORICAL FICTIONS

Salomé is not Alvarez's first effort to re-imagine Dominican national history in her fiction. That distinction belongs to her well-received second novel, *In the Time of the Butterflies* (1994), which recounts the lives of the famed Mirabal sisters, three activists who were assassinated in 1960 by operatives of Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo (1891-1961). After their deaths, the mariposas (butterflies) became national heroines, symbolic of the people's resistance to a brutal and corrupt regime. Their deaths are often said to have been the final straw leading to Trujillo's downfall, which followed some six months later, in May 1961.[33] They are so iconic that their images appear on Dominican

[33] The sisters were: Patria Mercedes Mirabal (1924-1960), María Argentina Minerva Mirabal (1926-1960), and Antonia María Teresa Mirabal (1935-1960). Trujillo operatives strangled and beat the women to death,

currency, and they feature prominently in the recently opened Museo de la Resistencia Dominicana (Museum of the Dominican Resistance), which documents the abuses of the Trujillato and memorializes its victims (Archibold).[34] In the years following their assassinations, the sisters have become internationally celebrated figures. Since 1999, the United Nations has annually commemorated the date of their death, November 25th, as the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women.

Alvarez's self-professed goal with *Butterflies* was to look beyond the Mirabal hagiography in order to discover the "real" women behind the stories. She writes in "Chasing the Butterflies" that she "wanted to understand the living, breathing women who had faced all the difficult challenges and choices of those terrible years. I believed that only by making them real, alive, could I make them mean anything to the rest of us" (203). Accordingly, in her research for the novel, she examined the women's personal writings and spoke at length with their surviving sister, Dedé (1925-2014). Such work allowed her to humanize the mariposas—to depict their interpersonal disputes, their doubts about the resistance movement, their struggles within Dominican patriarchy, and the trauma they experienced at the hands of the Trujillato. By imagining the sisters' lived experiences in a way that thus exceeded official historiographies, Alvarez suggested how they could be read outside of overly simplified nationalist or heroic paradigms. [35]

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along with their driver Rufino de la Cruz (1923-1960), then staged the deaths to look like a car accident. The women's deaths sparked national and international outrage, and were alleged to have motivated some of Trujillo's assassins.

[34] Prior to the opening of the Museo in 2010, the mariposas were primarily memorialized in a private museum maintained by their surviving sister, Dedé.

[35] It should be noted that some scholars have taken issue with Alvarez's re-imaginings. Suárez in particular critiques Alvarez's reluctance to depict explicitly the *physical* brutalities the women faced at the hands of the regime, wondering "whether the liberties Alvarez took in changing the 'facts' of Trujillo's despotism

The author expresses similar goals for her depictions of Salomé and Camila Henríquez Ureña, writing in the acknowledgements of *Salomé* that she seeks "to understand the great silence from which these two women emerged and into which they have disappeared" (357). However, complicating the Henríquez Ureña women's portrayal in dominant historiographies is a far more difficult project than re-imaging the Mirabals, for two primary reasons. The first is a practical one: no Dedé exists for Salomé or Camila—siblings and contemporaries are long dead or infirm. Whatever off-the-record stories remain about the Henríquez Ureña women are, at best, second-hand and fragmentary. The second reason is that, whereas the Mirabals' own anti-authoritarian politics lend themselves to challenging official histories, members of the Henríquez Ureña family occupied central positions in the governments and nationalist movements that contributed to current hegemonic understandings of dominicanidad.

Indeed, the men of the Henríquez Ureña family were often empowered to construct and enforce the very "official" historical narratives that Alvarez's fiction has typically sought to trouble. Patriarch Francisco, for example, served briefly as president of the Republic in 1916 and was an influential figure within the late-nineteenth-century nationalist movement known as progreso (progress), which defined the newly independent country as humanist, Euro-centric, and anti-Haitian. Son Pedro (1884-1946) became a nationally revered scholar, famous for his valorizations of Hispanic-American culture, and for his vocal opposition to the 1916 U.S. occupation of the Dominican

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served to soften the extreme cruelty suffered under his reign" (*Tears of Hispaniola* 11). She compares *Butterflies* unfavorably with works such as Edwidge Danticat's *The Farming of Bones* (1998) and Junot Díaz's *Drown* (1996), both of which are more graphic in their depictions of the Trujillato's violence.

Republic. Son Maximilian (1886-1968) served as a high-ranking official in the Trujillo government.[36] As women, Salomé and Camila never had the opportunity to hold office or direct political power within the Dominican Republic. However, both were as deeply invested in nationalist projects as their male counterparts—perhaps even more so.

Salomé, like her husband Francisco, was a vocal adherent of progreso thought. According to Carlos Ulises Decena in his study, *Tacit Subjects: Belonging and Same-Sex Desire among Dominican Men* (2011), this ideology was informed by "nineteenth-century liberalism" and "sought to reinvigorate the project of the nation-state by infusing it with a forward-looking orientation" (80). In other words, progreso advocated the kind of teleological, monolithic view of dominicanidad that Alvarez has questioned throughout her career. Salomé's verses, especially her early ones, were emblematic of this mode of thought. For example, in "La Gloria del Progreso" ("The Glory of Progress"), a piece composed in 1874 whose title alone is indicative of her philosophy, she exhorts Dominican youth: "Haz que de ese profundo/ y letárgico sueño se levante,/ y, entre el aplauso inteligente, al mundo/ el gran hosanna del Progreso cante" ("Awake from this deep/ and lethargic sleep/ and, amidst intelligent applause, sing to the world/the great hosanna of Progress") (*Poesias Completas* 81).[37] Many of her other works, such as "A la Patria" ("To the Homeland"), are likewise deeply nationalistic in tone.

If the tenor of Salomé's verses contrasts starkly with Alvarez's own circumspection about nationalist identities and ideologies, the poetess's posthumous

[36] For more information about Francisco and Pedro, see Moya Pons, as well as Silvio Torres-Saillant and Ramona Hernández's *The Dominican Americans*.
[37] All translations from this point on are mine unless indicated otherwise.

political legacy is equally problematic for Alvarez. Salomé's esteem among the Dominican populace has made her a useful totem for authoritarian figures seeking legitimacy with the people. Editions of her poetry have been commissioned almost exclusively by politicians, a trend that began in 1880, when her husband and a group of thinkers calling themselves Amigos del País (Friends of the Nation) published the first edition of her work. A 1950 edition was commissioned by none other than Trujillo himself; he also named the national poetry award after her, and it bears her name to this day.[38] His corrupt and authoritarian successor, Joaquín Balaguer (1906-2002), commissioned yet another edition of her works in 1988 in order to celebrate the transfer of her "venerables cenizas" (venerable ashes) to the National Pantheon (Vallejo de Paredes i). The state's vested interest in associating itself with Salomé's poetry and image has thus linked her to "official," and often brutal, narratives of dominicanidad well beyond her lifetime.

In contrast, the life of Camila Henríquez Ureña seems at first glance to be ideal raw material for Alvarez's efforts to unsettle nationalist iterations of Dominican identity. Like Alvarez, Camila spent the majority of her life in diaspora, residing primarily in Cuba and the United States.[39] Her best-known writings reflect this experience, taking on

[38] The dictator had her works republished in 1950 to celebrate the centennial of her birth. This edition proclaimed Salomé "la musa de la civilización" ("the muse of our civilization") and "la gran poetisa la que encarnó las esperanzas y los anhelos de la República ya consolidada" ("the great poetess who incarnated the hopes and dreams of the Republic now established") (Balaguer 11).

[39] After Salomé's death, the family fled to Cuba due to Francisco's conflict with Dominican dictator General Ulises Heureaux (1845-1899), who sought to repress the nation's intellectuals. Francisco made intermittent returns to serve in several Dominican governments after Heureaux's death, though he was driven into exile by the U.S. occupation of 1916. He died in Cuba in 1935. While Max returned to the Dominican Republic, Camila and Pedro spent most of their lives in exile out of protest against the Trujillo regime. See Moya Pons, as well as Torres-Saillant and Hernández for more information.

a Pan-Caribbean bent. Her essays, "Feminismo" ("Feminism") (1939), "La mujer y la cultura" ("Woman and Culture") (1949), and "La carta como forma de expresión literaria feminina" ("The Letter as Feminine Form of Literary Expression") (1949), have recently been claimed by Dominicana scholars such as Daisy Cocco de Filipis, Mirta Yañez, and Chiqui Vicioso as significant contributions in the history of Spanish-speaking Caribbean feminism at large.[40] Likewise, her decision to adopt Cuban citizenship (despite her family's objections) and retire to that island rather than to the Dominican Republic suggests a transnational sense of self.

However, Camila's Pan-Caribbeanism, like that of José Martí, whose life and works she admired greatly, is articulated in tandem with a post-colonial nationalism.[41] Just as Martí theorized his hemispheric vision of nuestra américa (our America) as part of his campaign for Cuban independence from Spain, Camila's decision to adopt Cuban citizenship after years of living in the United States is linked to her support for Fidel Castro's overthrow of the U.S.-backed regime of Fulgencio Batista. In other words, exile appears to have altered the tenor of her nationalism without eliminating it—in keeping with Simon Gikandi's observation that "exile generates nationalism and with it the desire for decolonized Caribbean spaces" (83).[42] In Camila's case, this exilic, post-colonial nationalism manifested in a dedication to Cuban sovereignty. She participated actively in

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[40] This claiming can perhaps in part be attributed to Alvarez's novel, as all three of the aforementioned scholars published works on Camila after *In the Name of Salomé* was released.

[41] In 1971, she published an essay on Martí in which she wrote: "[. . .] interpretemos la vida de Martí como el cumplimiento de un gran deber cívico y humano, y ambas, su obra y su vida, como la realización de un destino cabal" ("[. . .] we should interpret Martí's life as the fulfillment of a great civic and human duty, and both his work and his life as the realization of an ultimate destiny") ("En torno" 9).

[42] Amy Kaminsky has likewise suggested connections between exile and nationalism, asserting an affective dimension to the phenomenon by arguing that an "individual's sense of dislocation in exile probably intensifies the sense of self as part of a nation" (34).

post-Revolution nation building, assisting in "the restructuring of the University of Havana" and serving as technical advisor to the Minister of Education ("Henríquez Ureña, Camila" 315). Such activities suggest not only her investment in the nation as a means of self-making, but also her willingness to help shape the "official" narratives taught to the youth of Castro's Cuba. Thus, while Camila embodies a dominicanidad that is not delimited by the geographic or political boundaries of the Dominican Republic, she is by no means a wholly post-nationalist figure.

Given Alvarez's long-established suspicion of authoritarian histories and her own persistently liminal sense of identity, Salomé and Camila are unlikely figures for the novelist to fictionalize. To fruitfully reimagine these women, Alvarez must deconstruct their legacies, and in order to do this, she turns to the Henríquez Ureña family archives. She traces these archives throughout the Americas, travelling to Havana, Santiago de Cuba, Santo Domingo, Vassar College, and even to Valley City, North Dakota. She speaks to archivists and pores over documents and photographs, noting in the acknowledgements to *Salomé* that she "read and reread" (356) every edition of Salomé's poems, as well as the collected correspondence of the entire family. As my next section will demonstrate, in thus directly engaging with the archive and archiving—eventually fictionalizing both—Alvarez developed the means to imagine these two women outside the confines of nationalist narratives.[43]

[43] Alvarez details her archival searches in a forthcoming essay entitled "Little Things That Make a Novel (and Sometimes Do Not Make it into a Novel): Being a Series of Anecdotes on the Writing of *In the Name of Salomé*." She very generously agreed to share the piece with me during her March 2014 visit to the University of Texas at Austin.

FICTIONALIZING CURATORSHIP: ARCHIVAL PROCESSES IN SALOMÉ

While archives have been acknowledged as sites of discursive and political power at least since the publication of Michel Foucault's *Archaeology of Knowledge* in 1969, scholarly attention to the processes by which objects are deemed archival—or as Diana Taylor puts it, the methods by which items are "selected, classified, and presented for analysis" (19)—is still relatively nascent. The majority of criticism interested in this phenomenon has, perhaps out of necessity, emerged primarily within post-colonial and queer studies frameworks.[44] Thinkers such as Taylor, González-Echevarría, Achille Mbembe, and Ann Laura Stoler (to name but a few) are all invested in viewing the archive as a cultural and discursive practice.[45] Doing so allows them to trace the construction of imperial narratives, and thus to denaturalize those narratives.

All of these scholars have been vital to the development of this chapter. However, for the purposes of my analysis of *Salomé*, I find two moments from Stoler's *Along the Archival Grain* (2009) particularly prescient—so much so that they inspired my title, "Conjuring Doubt." In short succession, Stoler calls archives "sites of the expectant and conjured" (Loc. 143-44) as well as "records of uncertainty and doubt" (Loc. 207-10). In both instances, she is detailing the archive's relationship to colonial narratives and affects. However, the juxtaposition represented by these two descriptions—transformative potentiality and persistent indeterminacy—also aptly characterizes

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[44] A major exception is Paul Ricouer's phenomenological study, *Memory, History, Forgetting* (2004), in which he calls for an "analysis of the act of placing materials in such archives" and theorizes the archive as a social unit (Loc. 2503-04).

[45] Mbembe, for instance, declares the archive "not a piece of data, but a status" (20). González-Echevarría calls the archive "not so much an accumulation of texts as the process whereby texts are written" (24).

Alvarez's dramatization of archives and curatorial processes in *Salomé*. Throughout the novel, she raises questions about what gets included and excluded from the Henríquez Ureña family papers, who gets to make those decisions, and where those materials are physically housed. By drawing attention to how the family's archive was codified, and the myriad ways it *could* have been codified, Alvarez introduces (conjures) doubt about the meaning of Salomé's and Camila's public legacies. That doubt becomes generative—opening (conjuring) a space for Alvarez to imagine Henríquez Ureña women that critique hegemonic and exclusionary models of dominicanidad.

Although a number of scholars have focused on *Salomé*'s engagement with Dominican history, relatively few have focused on archives and curatorship despite the fact that both are central to the novel's plot. Trenton Hickman and Joan Hoffman have examined this facet of the text most extensively, with a particular eye to Camila's role as keeper of the family papers. Hickman, drawing upon Foucault's assertion that archives establish "the law of what can be said" (*Archaeology* 129), argues that the Henríquez Ureña family papers function to "guard and mediate any further discourse" about Salomé ("Hagiographic" 100). While this is of course true, he fails to acknowledge that, as Saidiya Hartman notes, archival materials can be reclaimed "for contrary purposes," and read "against the grain" (*Scenes* 10). Furthermore, he ignores the archive as a site of excess—a site of "competing testimonies" (Ricoeur Loc. 2186), traces, and telling silences.[46] As such, he forecloses the possibility that Camila might use the archive to create her own, subversive narrative of Salomé.

[46] As González-Echevarría asserts, "gaps are as constitutive of the Archive as much as volume" (182).

Hoffman, on the other hand, readily acknowledges that archives can be used to trouble official histories. Indeed, the main thrust of her argument is that Camila's curatorship allows her to distinguish "reality from the legend" and rescue "her mother from the story of her mother" (Hoffman 122). While such assertions are compelling, Hoffman falls prey to a misapprehension cited by Stoler, Mbembe, and other archival scholars: her language implies that she views archives primarily as "sites of knowledge retrieval" rather than as sets of discursive practices ("Colonial Arts" 87). Her aforementioned association of archive with "reality" versus "legend" or "story" indicates a belief that the Henríquez Ureña family papers present unmediated access to Salomé. More problematic still, in arguing that archives allow Camila to "discover" (120) the real Salomé and reconnect with her severed "motherline" (122), Hoffman links archive to the romance of lost origins so often problematized by Caribbean scholars.[47] She implies that Camila has merely to turn to the archives in order to find the Truth of her identity; carried to its conclusion, her argument suggests that Camila's engagement with the family papers serves merely to replace one unified, teleological history with another.

Camila's own characterization of her role as curator is more complex than either Hickman's or Hoffman's. Early in the text, she ruminates on her task: "She is to sort out what to give the archives and what to destroy [. . . .] she, the nobody among them, will be the one *editing* the story of her famous family" (*Salomé* 38, emphasis added). Camila's use of "editing" here implies an understanding that archives are always mediated, and that whatever information she finds in the family papers has likely been shaped by

[47] Most famously, Stuart Hall, Édouard Glissant, and Antonio Benítez-Rojo.

previous curatorships (namely her father's and brothers'). She also readily acknowledges the archive as a site of indeterminacy and excess meaning:

> Every night she pores over her mother's box: a sachet with dried purplish flowers; a catechism book, *Catón cristiano*, with little girl's handwriting on the back cover; silly poems from someone named Nísidas; a lock of hair; a baby tooth tied up in a handkerchief; a small Dominican flag her mother must have sewn herself, its stick snapped off, no doubt from the weight of the other packets upon it. *What these things mean, only the dead can tell*. (*Salomé* 45, emphasis added).

Despite her own sophisticated understanding of curatorship, and a brief rebellious impulse to send everything to the public archives (*Salomé* 44), Camila ultimately keeps some of the documents private, as per her brother Max's instructions. However, in offering us Camila's perspective, Alvarez makes the editing process transparent to readers, thus drawing attention to the constructedness of Dominican history, and to the traces of alternate histories housed in the archive. This is particularly powerful in relation to aspects of Salomé's and Camila's identities that conflict with hegemonic dominicanidad: the poetess's possible African ancestry, and her daughter's apparent "intimidad" (intimacy) with another woman ("Little Things" 21).

Throughout Salomé's sections of the novel, the poetess is open, if resigned, about the obvious presence of "Africa in her skin and hair" (*Salomé* 94). Alvarez claims to have based the poetess's racial identity on a blurry authentic photo acquired during her research: "the eyes were heavy-lidded . . . the lips were pouty and full, especially the bottom lip . . . . One thing was absolutely clear from the deeper sepia color of her skin and the texture of the hair: Salomé was indeed a woman of mixed race" ("Little Things"

3).[48] Despite Salomé's centrality to the Henríquez Ureña archive, the hints of blackness that Alvarez detects—along with the racial anxieties and melancholia that such blackness likely produced in a country rife with anti-Haitian, anti-black sentiment—are nowhere to be found in the materials that Camila bequeaths to public archives.

This striking absence is due in part to the fact that, as Maya Socolovsky puts it, Salomé has become "invisible beneath her poetry" (20), reduced to an abstraction (i.e., la musa de la patria) rather than remaining an embodied, racialized subject. To some extent, the content of Salomé's verses facilitates this invisibility; her only reflections on race are encomiums to the Dominican people's annihilated indigenous ancestors in poems such as "Anacaona."[49] Dawn Stinchcomb notes that this "reincarnation of the Dominican *indio* [indian]" (34) has historically been a common means of explaining the diversity of Dominican phenotypes without acknowledging the presence of African ancestry. We must therefore recognize Salomé's own complicity in the rewriting of Dominican racial history and identity.[50] However, the novel suggests that in order to determine fully how the poetess's own blackness was elided from public memory, we should turn to the archive and the first person who managed it: Francisco Henríquez y Carvajal.

It is perhaps unsurprising, given the patriarchal nature of the progreso movement, that Salomé's husband maintains control of the family documents—and by extension her

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[48] Significantly, in the manuscript she shared with me Alvarez referred to Salomé as a "black woman." After granting me permission to use excerpts from "Little Things" in this chapter, she noted this change in order to reflect her "own education/elucidation about race terms, since writing this piece in 2000, as a result of discussions about Obama" ("Re: quoting").

[49] "Anacaona" (1880) tells the story of the eponymous Taino chieftess who lived on the island of Hispaniola at the time of Columbus's arrival.

[50] The novel attempts to deflect responsibility for this work to Francisco, as Salomé claims that her husband asked her to take up the "indigenous theme that all our young poets were writing about" (*Salomé* 132).

public persona—until his death in 1935. The novel certainly explores the gendered dynamics of this arrangement, raising questions about masculine control of Dominican historiography and the exclusion of women from writing their own narratives. However, I am most interested in the racial politics of Francisco's curatorship—politics epitomized in the family archive by a photograph in which the poetess appears "*pale*, pretty, with a black neck band and a full rosebud mouth" (*Salomé* 205, emphasis added). This picture is the family's primary representation of the poetess's physical appearance, and Francisco insists upon its veracity. However, the provenance of the photo is more complicated than is immediately apparent: rather than being a snapshot of Salomé herself, it is in fact a "photo of a painting" commissioned by Francisco after his wife's death (*Salomé* 43). Camila claims that the portrait is loosely based on an "actual photograph" (*Salomé* 44) in which her mother's African ancestry is clear, but this latter image is never located during the course of her curatorship.

Figure 3: Photograph of Salomé Henríquez Ureña

The use of photography to reproduce and distribute the portrait is a particularly canny means by which Francisco crafts Salomé's public image. He seems to have an intuitive understanding of what Marita Sturken suggests about photographs: they can simultaneously "embody and create memories" and "obliterate" them (20). The photograph of Salomé's portrait does both, creating the memory of a white Salomé while obliterating the memory of her blackness—quite successfully, it appears. Camila's American student assistant mistakes the image for a genuine photograph of the poetess (*Salomé* 43). Trujillo (himself adept at using photography and other visual media to erase his Haitian ancestry) imprints the image on the Dominican fifty-cent coin, thus solidifying Salomé as white in the public memory (*Salomé* 71).[51] That memory has endured to the present day; as of this writing, a web-based image search for Salomé Henríquez Ureña immediately produces portraits of a light-skinned woman.

While Francisco's idealized visual representation of Salomé is not publicly contested within the novel, and seemingly remains entrenched in Dominican culture, the photograph can be read "against the grain" to suggest Salomé's African ancestry. In *Camera Lucida*, Roland Barthes argues that photographs connote a simultaneous absence and presence; a recognition that, "on the one hand 'it [the subject of the photo] is not there,' on the other 'but it has indeed been'" (115). For the perceptive viewer, the absent-presence evoked by the photograph exceeds that of the nominal subject (Salomé as an embodied subject), instead encompassing *another image*. As a reproduction, the photo recalls the absented original painting, which comes between the viewer and the historical

[51] Trujillo's mother was of Haitian origin, and the dictator made extensive use of powders to lighten his skin in all photographs and official images.

Salomé's body. In other words, Salomé the racialized subject is absented as an absent-presence in favor of an idealized image of Salomé as la musa. This double absenting introduces a gap into the archive, which in turn invites speculation, for as González-Echevarría suggests, the gap is both the "core of the Archive" and "the very source of fiction" (186). If nothing else, the absence of an actual photograph is legible as an historical anomaly, given that period photos of numerous other progreso thinkers (including Francisco) exist, and photographic technology developed significantly during Salomé's lifetime. This gap at the core of the Henríquez Ureña archive suggests that Salomé's body is, for some reason, *not directly representable*—and as readers of the archive, we are left to imagine why.

That Salomé may have been black, and that her blackness is unrepresentable within official archives despite her poetic achievements is a painful indication of the limitations of dominicanidad and of progreso thought. While it espoused a liberal humanist agenda, the progreso movement was like many Latin American nationalisms of the nineteenth century in that it engaged openly in anti-black rhetoric—largely because blackness was synonymous with Haiti and "synonymous with slavery" (Stinchcomb 15). Dominican elites of the period were deeply concerned with managing the island's demographics, advocating for the regulation of reproductive labor—particularly that of non-white bodies. As Decena notes, progreso thinkers argued for "proper racial mixing (to produce lighter-skinned children) and a reduction of the 'inferior races,' which they perceived as an impediment to modernization" (118).[52] Francisco's efforts to control his

[52] Stinchcomb corroborates Decena's observation: "from the inception of the independent nation,

wife's image thus suggest the anti-black sentiment of progreso thought, and they also suggest his own anxieties as a converted Jew in a largely Catholic nation (*Salomé* 171). In order to secure the family's position within the Dominican hierarchy, he must manage its ethnically and racially marginal bodies—thus transforming himself into a Catholic, and his wife into a light-skinned woman. Only then could the family become citizen-subjects legible as representatives of dominicanidad.

Socolovsky argues that Alvarez's novel, in allowing Salomé to speak for herself, undoes Francisco's work, bringing the poetess's body back into history and re-racializing her (19-20). While the novel certainly strives for this goal, I contend that *Salomé* is circumspect about its own achievements vis-à-vis race. In particular, I am troubled by the lingering absence of the "actual" photograph from family and state archives, which I read as the novel's acknowledgement that Salomé's body has *not* yet been brought to Dominican history. Camila's claim that the photo is "somewhere"—a location that exists, but remains tantalizingly elusive—is both evocative and affecting (*Salomé* 44). That "somewhere" is perhaps a historical limbo, or what David Eng calls the "waiting room of history" (69), a place outside of and unthinkable to extant epistemologies. It is perhaps a utopic hope for the future, that dominicanidad will someday be rid "of white supremacist thought and negrophobic discourse [. . .] to allow finally a celebration of our rich African

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Dominicanness always has indicated a difference from all that is black. Yet despite efforts to persuade Europeans to immigrate in order to outnumber blacks, on the one hand, and the efforts to encourage racial mixing to absorb the unwanted black physical traits that began in the late sixteenth century, on the other, the majority of the population of the Dominican Republic are still quite visibly of African descent. Since the nineteenth century, considering their need to differentiate themselves from Haitians, the only way to successfully 'whiten' the Dominican population has been to impose a racist rhetoric that would redefine whiteness" (Stinchcomb 5). She also explains that this "whitening" was a regional phenomenon: "The 'whitening' of Latin America has been a common strategy to 'improve' the population of many countries through immigration policies and social pressures based upon aesthetic prejudices" (2).

heritage" (Torres-Saillant 1109). In either case, while the novel's dramatization of curatorship allows readers to imagine Salomé's blackness, it also emphasizes the continued marginalization of that blackness within hegemonic Dominican historiographies. Alvarez thus suggests a different way that la musa is representative of her patria: as a figure of disappointment and deferral, indicative of how the failures of nationalist thought continue to haunt formulations of dominicanidad. Indeed, the Dominican Republic's decision on September 23, 2013 to revoke citizenship from all descendants of undocumented Haitian migrants dating back to 1929—rendering some two hundred thousand people stateless—is a stark reminder that anti-black sentiment remains alive and well in Salomé's nation of birth.[53]

While the novel depicts Salomé as the passive object of Francisco's reimaginings, the elision of Camila's possible same-sex desires from official histories is apparently a combination of her own doing and the work of later archivists.[54] Yet, as with Salomé's African ancestry, traces of Camila's powerful intimidad with Marion Risk can still be found in the archives—if one knows whom to ask and where to look. Yañez, in the process of researching her study *Camila y Camila* (2003), stumbled across numerous documents testifying to this relationship, including letters, holiday cards, and photographs of the two women together. Of most significance, however, was a letter

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[53] In May of 2014, after intense international pressure, the Dominican Republic made provisions to naturalize descendants of undocumented Haitian migrants (Gaestel). It remains to be seen when or if these provisions will be successfully implemented.

[54] The complicated racial and gender politics of Camila's curatorship should be noted, although they are outside the scope of this study. Camila's light skin affords her the racial privilege denied her mother (*Salomé* 201). However, it is clear that her gender makes her a less than ideal candidate for curator. The position is passed first from her father to her brothers; Max only entrusts her with the papers because he feels he cannot allow a non-family member to do the job (*Salomé* 38).

pointed out to her by Pedro Henríquez Ureña scholar Diony Durán—a letter that remains unclassified in the family archive, and that is conspicuously absent from published collections of Pedro's correspondence (Yañez 30). In it, Pedro frets to Max about their sister's "sistema de vida anormal" (abnormal lifestyle), describing it as "costoso" (costly) and unsustainable (qtd. in Yañez 32). He complains of Camila's "manía de no abandonar Miss Risk" (mania not to abandon Miss Risk), and informs Max that he has invited Camila to come to Mexico "con miembras de la famila o sola, nunca con Miss Risk" (with family members or alone, never with Miss Risk) (qtd. in Yañez 31-2). This letter's status as archival "secret," along with its expression of Pedro's vehement antipathy toward Marion and his anxiety for Camila to fulfill the "'carrera de la mujer'—el matrimonio" ('profession of woman'—marriage), (qtd. in Yañez 32), are highly suggestive. Combined, these factors indicate at the very least a problematically fierce emotional attachment between the two women—and perhaps a romantic and/or sexual one. [55]

[55] Alvarez also came across this letter during her research, noting that a scholar had "in strictest confidence" pointed her to the unpublished document ("Little Things" 20).

Figure 4: Photograph of Camila Henríquez Ureña (right) and Marion Risk. Yañez describes this as "una de las pocas fotos personales de Camila tomado con camarito de aficionados" (one of the few personal photos of Camila taken with an amateur camera) (30).
From *Camila y Camila* (2003).

Despite this fascinating history, and the fact that Camila's relationship with Marion is a recurring plot point throughout *Salomé*, nothing extensive has been written on same-sex desire in Alvarez's novel. As of this writing, only Julee Tate and Socolovsky address the issue, and each does so in passing. Consequently, the motivations for

Camila's curatorial decisions with regard to this aspect of her life remain underexplored. Tate suggests that Camila edits her sexuality out of the archive because she fears Salomé's posthumous judgment—in other words, that she is ashamed of her desires (197). However, it is more accurate to state that Camila is, at worst, ambivalent about her sexuality. Her relationship with Marion is often fraught, but she denies any "squeamishness" (*Salomé* 82) about her attraction to women and harbors no illusions about her own inability to perform heteronormativity. Likewise, Yañez's research suggests that familial disapproval had minimal effect on the historical Camila's attachment to Marion—their relationship seems to have dissolved on its own as the result of geographic distance.

Socolovsky, in contrast, suggests that Camila's sexuality is "silenced under a national gaze" (17), and there is ample historical evidence to support that assertion. In her retirement to post-Revolutionary Cuba, Camila would have borne witness to the Castro regime's criminalization of homosexuality and its association of same-sex desire with counter-revolutionary activity.[56] She would also have borne witness to the creation in 1965 of the infamous Unidades Militares de Ayuda Producción (Military Units to Aid Production), or UMAP camps, which imprisoned gay men and forced them into hard labor. While women who loved women were not subjected to these levels of abuse, they were still "the object of the voyeuristic and repressive actions of the state" (Quiroga Loc.

[56] She was certainly aware of the regime's repression of homosexual voices, as she served on the jury of the Cuban Writers and Artists Union when it denied first prize to Reinaldo Arenas's *Singing from the Well* (1967) in favor of pro-Castro propaganda (Arenas 76). Arenas considered Camila "an exceptional woman" and claimed that she "fought hard to give first prize to *Singing from the Well*" (76).

334-36).[57] Indeed, in the last two years of Camila's life, her status as Professor Emeritus at the University of Havana may very well have been jeopardized had her sexuality been made public; at the recommendation of the 1971 Congress on Education and Culture, homosexuals were fired from positions of "influence" over Cuba's youth (Lumsden 74-75). Editing the archive might thus be seen as a matter of closeting for the sake of self-preservation on Camila's part. However, Yañez's research makes it clear that the historical Camila did *not* silence all traces of her sexuality within the archive. Camila's motivations as curator thus appear to be more complex than either Tate or Socolovsky acknowledge, and it is with this in mind that I approach her editing of the archive.

Within *Salomé* itself, Camila's relationship with Marion is most thoroughly documented in epistolary form. According to Yañez, the two women corresponded (with varying frequency) throughout their lives, and the novel offers an extended dramatization of this in chapter five, "Love and Yearning." In this chapter, Alvarez imagines a series of letters that Camila writes to Marion from Washington, D.C. in the summer of 1923. These missives never make the sexual terms of the women's relationship explicit. However, if we adopt José Quiroga's understanding of queer Latin@ epistolary as a "contradictory genre" that "talks about things by not talking about them" (Loc. 655), then it becomes possible to read these letters against the grain.[58] Like Salomé's portrait, Camila's "letters of longing and complaint" (*Salomé* 197) mark a suggestive gap at the

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[57] Jafari Allen, in *¡Venceremos?* (2011), concurs with José Quiroga on this point, writing that lesbians were "a problem for the state" (11).

[58] I use "queer" here because it is part of Quiroga's subtitle—*Interventions from a Queer Latino America*. I hesitate to use it in relation to Camila, however, given the well-documented problems of imposing queerness as a descriptor onto sexualities in so-called developing nations. I also hesitate to use the term because in *Salomé*, Camila herself refuses labels.

core of the public archive.

While the content of the letters is carefully innocuous, Alvarez's description of the physical circumstances of their production make them legible as potential expressions of same-sex desire. Camila pens the screeds late at night in her tiny attic bedroom, which she tells Marion is the only place she can have a bit of privacy.[59] Camila is, significantly, the only member of the Henríquez Ureña clan to have her own room in the house—albeit the least desirable room. She writes while "stripped down to a slip," because, as she explains to Marion, the "attic is getting hotter and hotter as the summer progresses. I am not sure how long I can stand it" (*Salomé* 202). The apparently clandestine nature of these letters' composition, the architecturally marginal and intimate space in which they are written, and the attention they call to Camila's physicality, lends them a transgressive quality. Indeed, if, as Quiroga asserts, queer epistolary expresses desire by "seeing oneself as one writes to another" (Loc. 655-60), these letters—invoking Camila's bed, her sweating body, the slip that must be clinging damply to her skin, her restlessness on long, hot nights—become outright erotic, suggesting frustration and longing. "I am not sure how long I can stand it" becomes both a complaint about the heat and a complaint of desire.

Alvarez gives readers access to these imagined letters, but Camila never sends them to Marion and what happens to them after 1923 remains unclear in the novel. It's possible that she destroys them in order to secure them from the public eye, for as

[59] Her need for privacy seems to be paramount, which is suggestive: "Sometimes she stands to stretch her back and look down at the quiet, residential street below. When a car approaches, she moves back from view, *though her perch is hidden by the branches of the huge sycamore in the front yard*" (*Salomé* 202, emphasis added).

Quiroga asserts, when it comes to epistolary, "one owns more completely if one destroys" (Loc. 655). Conversely, they might comprise the "tons of love letters" (*Salomé* 9) that she refuses to let her student assistant read to her in 1960—if so, this refusal implies that Camila preserves them, but withholds them from the materials donated to public archives. The unremarked disappearance of these letters, and Camila's apparent refusal to surrender control of them suggests, at first glance, that Tate and Socolovsky are correct in labeling Camila's actions a kind of closeting.

However, I'd like to complicate such readings by suggesting that Camila's editing is a reflection of her status as sujeto tácito (tacit subject) rather than a self-silencing or closeting. I borrow the term from Decena, who uses it to describe how, within Dominican communities, one's homosexuality can be enacted and understood without being publicly declared.[60] Decena writes that, "the sujeto tácito suggests that coming out can sometimes be redundant. In other words, coming out can be a verbal declaration of something that is already understood or assumed—tacit—in an exchange. *What is tacit is neither secret nor silent*" (19, emphasis added). Indeed, as mentioned above, it seems clear that Camila's sexuality was understood by those closest to her. Decena suggests that the sujeto tácito is thus motivated not by fear or shame, but by a desire to enact same-sex eroticism while maintaining a certain amount of social flexibility. Camila definitely echoes this desire, remarking on her distaste for "labels that pin the self down to only one set of choices" (*Salomé* 82). In withholding Marion's letters, in editing the archive, Camila is enacting

[60] Decena limits his study to homosexual Dominican migrants, but Quiroga's work, along with Juana María Rodríguez's work in *Queer Latinidad* (2003), suggests that the sujeto tácito is a wider phenomenon in Latin America and the Caribbean.

her status as sujeto tácito: she negotiates an identity that is not closeted to those "in the know" (i.e., her family and intimates), but that confounds easy interpellation by the state and the public. Akin to the sujeto tácito herself, the archive's gaps and traces are expressive of same sex desire only for those who know how to "recognize and decode" the signs (Decena 20).

Like Salomé's portrait, Camila's curatorship and the letters to Marion can help readers imagine expansive and fluid conceptions of dominicanidad. Camila's shaping of the Henríquez Ureña family archive, so important to conceptions of Dominican history and identity, reveals an important truth. While homosexuality may be marginalized in dominant historiographies and cultural narratives, it has always been constitutive of the nation—has, in fact, often played a central and indelible role in shaping the trajectory of dominicanidad. However, the fact that Camila's tacit status was ignored until so recently, and remains woefully under-discussed in literary scholarship about *Salomé*, speaks to the ongoing invisibility of homosexual women in the Spanish-speaking Caribbean. Indeed, as recently as 2006 an anthology of work by Dominican and Dominican American lesbians, *Divagaciones Bajo la Luna*/*Musings Under the Moon*, declared the need to combat "denial and discrimination [. . .] against those [women] who love other women" (Polanco vi).[61] Camila's letters thus seem to exist in the same "waiting room of history" as the real photograph of Salomé—as a sign of deferral, and as a hope for the future of dominicanidad.

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[61] As Quiroga notes, across Latin American cultures, lesbians have historically "been consigned to an effacement that [. . .] belied the male-centered concerns of institutions of power" (Loc. 329-30). Allen once again echoes Quiroga, noting that in post-Revolutionary Cuba, "Women who have sex with women seemed not to be talked about at all. Lesbians are effectively disappeared" (68).

As the above examples illustrate, reading the archive as process makes visible the construction of official histories, and the traces that open a space for imagining alternate narratives. This, in turn, allows for the destabilization of hegemonic national and cultural identities. However, reading archive as process requires attentiveness not just to the informational content, but also to the *physical presence* of the archive—in particular, its geographic location. In *Archive Fever*, Jacques Derrida argues that guardianship of archives has historically been granted to those who monopolize the power to construct and maintain dominant narratives: "The citizens who [. . .] held and signified political power were considered to possess the right to make or to represent the law. On account of their publicly recognized authority, it is at their home, in that *place* which is their house [. . .] that official documents are filed" (2, emphasis original). Given how central the Henríquez Ureña family is to the Dominican Republic's history, it seems logical that the Dominican state might also possess the Henríquez Ureña papers. However, as Alvarez dramatizes, the family's archive has, in fact, spent significant portions of time outside the borders of the Dominican Republic—to this day, the majority of the Henríquez Ureña papers remain in Havana ("Little Things").

Throughout *Salomé*, the Henríquez Ureña papers are housed in three different nations: the Dominican Republic, the United States, and Cuba. Thus, while the documents it contains are considered vital pieces of Dominican national history, the archive itself is nomadic, suggesting that conceptions of dominicanidad bound to the borders of the nation-state are woefully inadequate. Indeed, while the Dominican diaspora was relatively small during Salomé's and Camila's lifetimes, the archive's

movements foreshadow the dramatic growth of the diaspora in the mid-twentieth century and the re-workings of Dominican identity that phenomenon would necessitate.[62] As Decena notes:

> [. . .] the transnationalization of Dominican society [. . .] pluralized, exploded, and continued to put pressure on the national polity through the disarticulation of *dominicanidad* [. . .] from the geopolitical space of one nation and one state. Thus, the multiplication of sites for "being" Dominican undermined the hegemon of official and nationalist subject forms. (10)

The "multiplication of sites" for the archive likewise functions to explode its meaning, in turn multiplying the forms of Dominican subjectivity that it can be used to theorize. For Alvarez, the archives represent a view of dominicanidad as mutable and hemispheric, connected—for better or worse—to other locations in the Americas.

This is perhaps most painfully obvious in relation to the archive's presence in the United States. During the course of the novel, the family papers make multiple appearances in the U.S., and some documents remain permanently in archives at Harvard, Vassar, and the University of Minnesota.[63] However, I find their brief appearance in Minneapolis during the winter of 1918 to have particularly important implications for definitions of dominicanidad. Camila discovers a trove of family relics in Pedro's small trunk: "letters addressed from her mother to her father, a diary Pedro kept as a young boy [. . .] copies of a little newspaper that Pedro and Max used to publish as children" (*Salomé* 244). Within the Dominican Republic, these documents might register as nostalgic reminders of the family's—and the nation's—beginnings. However, their

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[62] Torres-Saillant and Hernández estimate that fewer than ten thousand Dominican immigrants lived in the United States by 1945 (80), the majority of them wealthy and well connected. It took Trujillo's assassination in 1961 to allow for the larger, middle and working-class exodus from the nation.

[63] Camila and/or Pedro had ties to each of these institutions.

presence in Minnesota during the U.S.'s eight-year occupation of the Republic lends the documents a far more melancholic significance. That Pedro is forced to find the papers a safe haven in hostile territory suggests both the tenuousness of Dominican national autonomy, and the island's uneasy reliance upon the economic and military goodwill of its expansionist neighbor to the north. A far cry from the triumphalist narratives that the Henríquez Ureña papers are typically used to support, the archive in this context indicates that dominicanidad has long been influenced by the policies and the geography of the United States. As such, it is both a (neo)colonized and diasporic, as well as a national, form of subjectivity.

While the archive's presence in the U.S. is legible in terms of conquest, diaspora, and global capital, its presence within Cuba is more ambivalent. As Alvarez tells it, the Henríquez Ureña papers have been housed in Cuba on and off over the last century. In some respects, this might be read as emblematic of the Spanish-speaking Caribbean's early twentieth-century tendency to view itself as a cultural and linguistic region (i.e. nuestra américa) allied against colonizing forces. The archive's movement between the two islands in this context suggests a Pan-Caribbean dominicanidad. Indeed, according to Camila, "[José] Martí once said to their uncle Federico, why speak of Cuba and Santo Domingo [the Dominican Republic], when even the underwater cordillera that runs from island to island knows they belong together" (*Salomé* 164). However, by the end of Camila's lifetime, the Cold War had undermined Martí's utopian vision and the two islands were at political odds: the Dominican Republic had allied with the U.S., and Cuba

with the Soviet Union.[64] Camila's decision in 1973 to leave Salomé's papers in Havana rather than bring them to Santo Domingo (*Salomé* 336) can therefore be viewed as a sharp rebuke of the Dominican state, an assertion that la musa's own patria does not have (or deserve) exclusive rights to her legacy. Ultimately, the archive's presence in Cuba is emblematic of a resistant form of dominicanidad—one that is critical of the toxic ideologies advanced by Trujillo and his successor, Balaguer.

In so thoroughly demonstrating that the Henríquez Ureña papers can support a multitude of histories, and that their meaning is contingent upon their geographic location, *Salomé* proclaims the necessity of the archive for challenging hegemonic conceptions of dominicanidad. As González Echevarría asserts, "[t]he Archive questions authority by holding warring discourses in promiscuous and mutually contaminating contiguity, a contiguity that often erases the difference separating them" (153). Alvarez's dramatization of Camila's curatorship encourages the reader to acknowledge how "warring" identities have always overlapped and commingled in the Dominican Republic and its diasporas. The oppositional categories that have historically excluded whole populations from dominicanidad—Dominican/black, Dominican/homosexual, patria/diaspora—are destabilized in the Henríquez Ureña archive. While Alvarez's novel acknowledges that eliminating such well-entrenched binaries from Dominican

[64] During this period, the Dominican Republic was key to the United States' efforts to isolate Fidel Castro politically and prevent the spread of communism in the Caribbean. The U.S. supported Trujillo due to his anti-communist stance. In 1965, the U.S. invaded the Dominican Republic, intervening in a civil war between the reigning military junta and leftist rebels. Via the U.S.'s intervention, new elections were held in which former Trujillo official and U.S. ally Joaquín Balaguer was installed as president, ruling for the next twelve years and ensuring the Republic's position as an anti-communist state. For more information on this period in Dominican history, see Moya Pons.

historiography is a difficult and ongoing process, its insistence that Dominican identity has *always* been a mobile, adaptive construct is a powerful first step towards imagining a more inclusive dominicanidad.

ARCHIVE AND THE PENDULAR PRESENT

As the previous section of this chapter indicates, one of the most significant advantages of approaching archiving as process is that, in doing so, "official" histories are denaturalized and it becomes possible to imagine the "what might have beens" of the past—a valuable accomplishment given that archives have often been used to buttress monolithic histories at the expense of more complex narratives. This tendency is apparent in the curatorships of Francisco and Pedro Henríquez Ureña; both men force the family's archive into nationalist narratives of dominicanidad, and then use it to legitimate those narratives within public discourse. Francisco is blatant about it, "improving" his wife's poems despite her protestations (*Salomé* 170) and attempting to dictate the content of her work, all for the sake of la patria: "'[. . .] you must not squander away your talent by singing in a minor key, Salomé. You must think of your future as the bard of our nation. We want the songs of la patria, we need anthems to lead us out of the morass of our past and into our glorious destiny as the Athens of the Americas" (*Salomé* 177). Pedro, though subtler, echoes his father's agenda, omitting Salomé's "'intimate verses'" (*Salomé* 161) from editions of her poetry published during the 1916-24 U.S. occupation in order to emphasize her more patriotic works. Father and son clearly view history and nation as moving toward some greater destiny, and carefully monitor the archive to ensure that it reflects as much.

Given their historical contexts, Francisco's and Pedro's investment in Dominican history as a history of progress is understandable. However, in the decades following their deaths (in 1935 and 1946, respectively), their belief in telos has become an archaism in Caribbean thought.[65] Indeed, since the last half of the twentieth century, Caribbean intellectuals have widely come to understand the region's history as disjointed and haunted. Édouard Glissant, for example, in his influential essay, "The Quarrel with History" (1976) argues that for the majority of people in the Caribbean, history is not linear, but "tormented" (65) because "[t]he past, to which we were subjected, which has not yet emerged as history for us is, however obsessively present" (63). M. Jacqui Alexander, in *Pedagogies of Crossing* (2005), offers a similar estimation of Caribbean history, arguing that it operates in palimpsestic time—meaning that the colonial past is visible just beneath the surface of the neocolonial present (190). These axioms that Caribbean history is fragmented, and that the past irrupts into the present, are by now orthodoxy in Caribbean studies; extant scholarship on *Salomé* unsurprisingly sounds both refrains. Lucía Suárez, for example, emphasizes Alvarez's engagement with the "broken memories of a past that is unclear" ("Anxiety" 119), whereas Socolovsky argues that *Salomé* demonstrates the "hauntedness" of the island's history (14).

While the novel certainly does both of those things, I contend that in its unusual structure, *Salomé* also operates in what Benítez-Rojo describes in *The Repeating Island*

[65] It is important to note that some of Pedro's contemporaries, particularly Alejo Carpentier, had already begun to experiment with non-chronological portrayals of history in their creative works. See, for example, Carpentier's "Viaje a la semilla" ("Journey to the Source"), published in 1944. In the decades immediately following Pedro's death, the neobarroco (neo-baroque) movement, exemplified by writers such as Carpentier, José Lezama Lima, and Severo Sarduy, would further trouble historical chronologies of the Spanish-speaking Caribbean.

(1992) as the "pendular present" of the Caribbean. He argues that "every Caribbean person's present is a pendular present, a present that implies the desire to have a future and a past at once. In the Caribbean one either oscillates toward a utopia or toward a lost paradise" (251). Alvarez's novel, with its twinned and inverse narratives (which I will discuss in greater detail momentarily), suggests the way that documents from widely disparate chronological moments can, in the archive, be placed in physical conjunction and read through each other. *Salomé* thus positions the reader in a less idealized version of Benítez-Rojo's pendular present, encouraging us not only to read the presence of Salomé's past in Camila's present, but also to read the presence of *Camila's future in Salomé's present.* One of the chief advantages of recognizing this pendular present is that it helps the reader to avoid viewing one narrative as secondary to the other—a tendency common in extant scholarship on the novel. Suárez and Socolovsky, for example, both focus primarily on how Camila works to reconcile with the past, situating Salomé's story as ancillary to her daughter's. Likewise, Hickman and Hoffman focus largely on Camila's efforts to resolve her identity crises via ordering the archive. Conceiving of the novel in terms of a pendular present makes it possible to consider the two women's lives simultaneously without necessarily relying upon direct relationships of cause-and-effect. This, in turn, allows readers to view Salomé and Camila afresh, and to view identities not as the culmination of teleological processes, but as constant, recurring negotiations with both remnants of the past and with hoped-for futures.

As mentioned above, Alvarez establishes the pendular present of the archive via the structure of the novel. While chronological play has long been characteristic of

Alvarez's fiction, beginning with her first novel, *How the García Girls Lost Their Accent* (1991), even by Alvarez's standards, *Salomé* is decidedly complex.[66] Each chapter of the book consists of two sub-chapters: one titled in Spanish that focuses on Salomé, and one titled in English that focuses on Camila. These sub-chapter titles correspond in reverse order—for example, Camila's first sub-chapter, entitled "One: Light," is reiterated in the title of Salomé's final sub-chapter, "Ocho: Luz" ("Eight: Light"). I have reproduced the novel's table of contents below and indicated the chronological period that each covers in order to help illustrate:[67]

PROLOGUE [Camila, June 1960]

I

Uno: El ave y el nido (One: Bird and Nest) [1856-61]
One: Light [1960]

Dos: Contestación (Two: Reply) [1865-1874]
Two: The Arrival of Winter [1950]
Tres: La fe en el porvenir (Three: Faith in the Future) [1874-77]
Three: Ruins [1941]

Cuatro: Amor y anhelo (Four: Love and Yearning) [1878-79]
Four: Shadows [1935]

II

Cinco: Sombras (Five: Shadows) [1880-86]
Five: Love and Yearning [1923]

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[66] *García Girls* might be viewed as a predecessor to Camila's narrative in *Salomé*, as, like hers, it wends its way backward through time.

[67] The dates indicated in brackets are not included in the table of contents, nor are the translations of the Spanish titles. I have included both in order to better demonstrate the structure of the novel. The italics and capitalizations are Alvarez's.

Seis: Ruinas (Six: Ruins) [1887-1891]
Six: Faith in the Future [1918]

Siete: La llegada del invierno (Seven: The Arrival of Winter) [1891-92]
Seven: Reply [1909]

Ocho: Luz (Eight: Light) [1893-94]
Eight: Bird and nest [1897]

EPILOGUE [Camila, 1973]

As the table of contents makes clear, the chapters mirror each other in translation without ever aligning or intersecting temporally. That mirroring is in itself suggestive, implying that diasporic Dominicans and those on the island operate on similarly "mirrored" trajectories, reflecting each other even as they remain distinct. In the remainder of this chapter, I'll be examining one set of paired chapters—chapters six—in order to illustrate how the novel's enactment of the archive's pendular present can undermine essentialist iterations of dominicanidad and generate new understandings of Dominican history.

Both chapters six provide the reader with fictionalized selections from the Henríquez Ureña family epistolary, inspired by actual letters Alvarez encountered during her research.[68] Salomé's chapter, "Ruinas" (Ruins), is comprised entirely of letters that she writes to Francisco during his four-year medical training in Paris. In order to convey these letters' status as physical documents, Alvarez depicts some of them as fragmentary, marked in the text as "MUTILADO" (mutilated), "ORIGINAL ROTO" (original torn),

[68] In "Little Things," she recounts reading some of Salomé's letters to Francisco, along with Pedro's aforementioned epistolary.

etc. Camila's chapter six, "Faith in the Future," depicts her time as a graduate student at the University of Minnesota and her search of Pedro's trunk, containing a packet of letters from her brother's confidante Alfonso Reyes (1889-1959), one of which is excerpted in the text.[69] As the antithetical titles suggest, these two chapters are each other's thematic inverse: Salomé's depicts the near-dissolution of her marriage to Francisco as a result of his infidelity, whereas Camila's chronicles the beginnings of her relationship with Marion.

Salomé's letters are fascinating in that they record the ways state and patriarchal control intersected to police Dominican femininity at the end of the nineteenth century. In her epistolary, she complains of being under surveillance by the Dominican government, then headed by dictator Ulises Heureaux (1845-1899), one of her husband's political enemies. In a letter dated December 9, 1887, she describes the need to censor herself for fear of reprisal from the state: "I must be more careful than ever what I say, unless a trusted individual is carrying the letters by hand—as the Llomparts are, in this instance" (*Salomé* 216). The dictatorship's concern about what Salomé might say is based on a fear of her poetic voice, which has tremendous influence among the Dominican people. Significantly, in its treatment of political subjects, her poetic voice is also gender-transgressive—encroaching into a public sphere that was typically reserved for men during this historical period. As Catharina Vallejo explains, "Es Salomé Ureña la primera poeta dominicana en lanzarse plenamente en una poesía explicítamente exterior al dominio de la casa" [Salomé Ureña is the first dominicana poet to throw herself fully into

[69] Reyes was a Mexican philosopher and writer.

a poetry that is explicitly outside the domain of the home] (35). This transgressiveness leads Salomé's passionate writings about la patria to be described in masculine terms throughout the novel. Her early pseudonymous poems are misattributed to a male author, and at one of her public readings a man in the audience exclaims, "'What a man that woman is!'" (*Salomé* 141). In pushing Salomé's voice out of the public sphere and into the private—most of her letters deal with child-rearing and other domestic details—the state thus not only removes a political threat, it also forces her into her "proper" feminine place.

Salomé faces similar surveillance from Francisco, though his studies in Paris mean that he must watch her by proxy—employing his brother Federico (1848-1952) to read all of Salomé's correspondence, as well as to visit their house "often and unannounced" (*Salomé* 216). The purpose of this scrutiny is ostensibly to ensure that Salomé's letters don't "preoccupy" Francisco with trivial concerns. However, its true purpose eventually becomes clear. In a letter dated September 6, 1888, Salomé writes the following missive:

> How dare you doubt my integrity! I cannot believe your brother, who does not allow any worrisome letter of mine to get through for fear it might preoccupy you (so that I, who hate subterfuge, have had to devise this scheme of sending what letters I can in the hands of friends and acquaintances), then turns around to disturb your peace of mind with this insulting rumor.
>
> NO MAN VISITS THE HOUSE except Federico and your countless brothers and our honorable friend Hostos. How dare you call me to account after all my sacrifices! (*Salomé* 218)

As a progreso thinker, Francisco is ostensibly at ideological odds with the repressive Heureaux regime. However, this letter implies that Francisco's suspicion of Salomé

stems from the same source as the state's—her transgression into the public sphere. Though he is a champion of Salomé's poetry, he is clearly concerned that her ability to move freely in masculine intellectual circles with figures such as himself, Federico, and Eugenio María de Hostos (1839-1903) makes it possible for her to transgress standards of Dominican female chastity.[70] Thus, while Francisco and other progreso thinkers would like to consider their movement a break from the "morass of the past," Salomé's letters illustrate that the break was not clean—that in terms of gender politics, progreso is repetition rather than advancement. [71]

While Camila's chapter six does not reproduce the Henríquez Ureña family epistolary to the same extent as Salomé's, the brief excerpt it does offer is likewise associated with patriarchal surveillance. This chapter details Pedro's efforts to clandestinely follow Camila on her evening walks around the University of Minnesota. Concerned that he might know about Marion, Camila, like her mother, resorts to "subterfuge," going through Pedro's trunk while he is away. In it, she finds a letter from his friend Reyes:

> About this worrisome matter of Camila. It is best, Pedro, if you have ocular proof and then there will be no doubt in your mind and no arguments on her part to sway you from what you must do. You and I both know how Americans are much more free in their ways. And these young Yanks (believe me, I have seen them over here) feel much more license with a foreign woman of indeterminate race. Once you have the evidence, you must confront her and insist she break off the relation and immediately upon graduation send her back to the safety of your family (*Salomé* 244).

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[70] Hostos was a Puerto Rican positivist philosopher and educational reformer who encouraged Salomé to create her school for girls—the first of its kind in the Dominican Republic

[71] As Vallejo notes of progreso, "En esta cosmovisión [. . .] la mujer no tenía otro papel sino el de acompañar servilmente al hombre, y era limitada estrictamente a la esfera domestica" [In this worldview . . . women had no other role but that of servile companion to man, and was strictly limited to the domestic sphere] (39).

Camila concludes that Pedro has no knowledge of Marion, and instead suspects her of "a secret love affair with a *man*!" (*Salomé* 244, emphasis original). This misapprehension on Pedro's part attests to a phenomenon addressed in the previous section of this chapter—the invisibility, or un-thinkability, of women's same-sex desire within dominicanidad. Reyes's warning about Americans being "more free in their ways" suggests that Pedro's fears about Camila's sexual practices are the same ones Francisco had about Salomé: that she is not abiding by Dominican standards of feminine chastity.

However, in a diasporic context, this fear takes on additional meaning. As Ann Cvetkovich notes, "[t]he traumas and anxieties produced by migration frequently generate sexual panics, especially fears about the loss of culture through intermarriage" (122). Pedro's surveillance is thus not merely about gender norms; it is about maintaining an "authentic" or "pure" dominicanidad.[72] Such concerns would have been exacerbated by the Dominican Republic's loss of sovereignty as a result of the U.S. occupation just two years prior to this letter's writing. With the political and cultural integrity of the Republic thus compromised, preserving an uncompromised dominicanidad becomes anticolonial resistance. It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that Pedro, one of the most prominent Dominican critics of the U.S. occupation, attempts to defend la patria through Camila's body.

While examining these two portions of the Henríquez Ureña archive individually is fascinating, analyzing them alongside and through each other illustrates what Decena

[72] Ironically, it was Pedro who married into another culture in 1923. His wife, Isabel Lombardo Toledano, was of Mexican birth.

calls the "asymmetrical yet intimate entanglements" (82) between the island and the diaspora. The letters obviously reveal that in both locations, women's bodies are politicized for the sake of maintaining hegemonic dominicanidad. However, the letters also illustrate that ideas about what constitutes authentic Dominican identity adapt in response to the pressures of specific historical moments and geographic locations. For example, the gendered division between public and private spheres that predominates Salomé's letters manifests under a new guise in Reyes's. His admonition that Pedro, "send [Camila] back to the safety of your family," reiterates the idea that women's place is in the home; however, home in this instance signifies the homeland in addition to the domestic space. Likewise, Pedro's concern with Camila's sexual activity is an echo of the progreso movement's concern for "proper racial mixing" (Decena 118), with anti-Americanism here replacing anti-Haitianismo. Such shifts and reverberations demonstrate that dominicanidad, far from being a fixed identity bound by the borders of the nation-state, has long been a mobile cultural formation shaped by exchanges between the island and diaspora.

If reading these letters alongside and through each other thus destabilizes conceptions of dominicanidad, that same practice also generates new interpretations of the novel's characters—interpretations that have much larger implications for understandings of Dominican history. For example, Pedro (like his mother) is a cultural hero among Dominicans, celebrated for his humanism, his valorization of Hispanic

American cultures, and his influence on literary studies in Latin America.[73] However, by placing Reyes's letter in conjunction with Salomé's, Alvarez implies a darker aspect of Pedro's character: namely that, in his policing of Camila's sexuality, he recreates not only Francisco's role as family patriarch, but *also* the practices of the despotic Heureaux regime. Pedro's status as well-regarded public intellectual makes even an oblique association with that kind of political terror disconcerting, indicating the ease with which epistemological violence translates into physical violence. Indeed, I would argue that the pairing of these letters hints at the brutality latent in Francisco's progreso ideologies and foreshadows the collusion of Dominican intellectual elites (including Pedro) with the Trujillo regime.[74] The archive's pendular present thus suggests the need to reconsider critically not only Pedro's legacy, but also Dominican intellectual history as a whole—to interrogate how the problematic elements of that history linger in the present, and what that might mean for the future of dominicanidad.

Though the novel's structure articulates a warning, the understandings of Salomé and Camila that it facilitates also make visible potentially liberatory counterhistories. The letters contained in both chapters six emphasize that Salomé and Camila enact distinct but equally "unruly" iterations of Dominican femininity. Read alongside each other, these pieces of the Henríquez Ureña archive thus attest to the ongoing historical presence of women's anti-patriarchal resistance in the Dominican Republic and the diaspora—a presence that suggests the possibility of thinking dominicanidad in transnational, feminist

[73] The national library is named after Pedro, as is a private university in Santo Domingo, and the Dominican Republic's annual prize for outstanding work in literature and criticism.
[74] Pedro served as the General Superintendent of Education under Trujillo from 1931-1933, ultimately leaving the position due to his disillusionment with the regime.

terms. Read *through* each other, the letters also make it possible to imagine a dominicanidad that acknowledges the existence, and the historical importance, of non-normative genders and sexualities. Indeed, the conjunction of these documents encourages readers to view the masculinity of Salomé's poetic voice and Camila's refusal of compulsory heterosexuality as related forms of feminist political resistance. While Camila laments her inability to live up to her mother's legacy throughout *Salomé*, Alvarez's novel—via its enactment of the pendular present—asserts that she is a revolutionary in her own right, and should be recognized as such in Dominican history.

Ultimately, the novel's structure illustrates that while the archive has been used to support unified, linear narratives of dominicanidad, the archive itself is neither a linear nor a unified entity. I would argue that Alvarez dramatizes what Mbembe observes in "The Power of Archive and Its Limits" (2002): "Through archived documents, we are presented with pieces of time to be assembled, fragments of life to be placed in order, one after the other, in an attempt to formulate a story that acquires its coherence through the ability to craft links between the beginning and the end. A montage of fragments thus creates an illusion of totality and continuity" (21). By requiring the reader to occupy a pendular present—vacillating constantly between non-contiguous "pieces of time" and "fragments of life"—Alvarez urges readers to recognize the realities cited by Mbembe. She disassembles the "montage of fragments" generated by figures such as Francisco and Pedro Henríquez Ureña, demonstrating how those fragments might be reassembled in myriad ways. In so doing, she imagines potentially different pasts *and* futures for dominicanidad.

CONCLUSION

Julia Alvarez, like Michelle Cliff, is a Caribbean diasporic writer "who is considered 'white' in her country and privileged on many levels" ("Anxiety" 188). She left her country of birth early and has spent most of her life in the United States. Like Cliff, whose command of Jamaican patois has been criticized, Alvarez's language has been shaped by diaspora; she claims to speak only "childhood Spanish" ("La Gringuita" 61). And as is the case with Cliff, those who stayed in the islands have questioned Alvarez's status as a Caribbean subject. It is perhaps little surprise, then, that *Salomé*, *Abeng*, and *No Telephone* utilize the archival impulse to similar ends—to generate healing counterhistories of the Antilles and its diasporas, and to create more inclusive theorizations of Caribbeanness.

Despite these shared interests, Alvarez's work articulates a version of the archival impulse that is distinct from Cliff's in two noteworthy respects. The first is that *Salomé* uses the impulse to develop a more focused and sustained critique of nationalist histories than Cliff's novels. This difference of emphasis is no doubt due to the Dominican Republic's own brutal post-independence history, particularly the mobilization of nationalist rhetorics by the Trujillo regime. However, *Salomé*'s critique has implications for the Antilles at large—suggesting that histories generated by Caribbean subjects must be scrutinized lest they commit epistemological violences akin to those enacted under colonization. The second distinction is one of methodology, necessitated by Alvarez's re-purposing iconic figures of Dominican history such as the Mirabals and the Henríquez Ureña family, about whom a wealth of written documentation exists. Working within

archival collections related to these figures, Alvarez exposes the fact that archives function as sites of knowledge production—that, they are "not so much an accumulation of texts as the process whereby texts are written" (González Echevarría 24)—thus affording another model by which Caribbean authors might de-naturalize received histories.

As I draw this chapter to a close, I'd like to suggest that the confluence of political and historiographic concerns represented in the works of Alvarez and Cliff illustrates the "delicate tenuity" (Césaire 47) separating the Anglophone from the Spanish-speaking Caribbean. The works discussed in the first two chapters of this study indicate not only the possibility—but also the necessity—of putting the two linguistic regions into conversation with each other. I contend that doing so affords a clearer picture of the structures of trauma that proliferate across the linguistic and national boundaries of the Caribbean. In the remaining chapters, I continue my analysis of Césaire's delicate tenuity by turning to more melancholic iterations of the archival impulse.

Chapter 3: "I cannot go back to where I came from": Archiving the Door of No Return in Dionne Brand's *At the Full and Change of the Moon*

"I cannot go back to where I came from. It no longer exists. It should not exist."
-Dionne Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return*

"In itemizing the long list of violations, are we any closer to freedom, or do such litanies only confirm what is feared—history is an injury that has yet to cease happening?"
-Saidiya Hartman, "The Time of Slavery"

Scattered across thousands of miles of West African coastline, the Doors of No Return are grim reminders of the transatlantic slave trade—relics of what Paul Gilroy calls the "primal history of modernity" (55). Most famously located at Senegal's maison des esclaves [Slave House], and at Ghana's Elmina and Cape Coast Castles, these porticoes were "last stops" for enslaved Africans, the points at which they were severed from everything they knew before enduring the horrors of the Middle Passage and New World plantation slavery. In recent years, thanks in no small part to the commercial success of Alex Haley's *Roots* (1976), the Doors have become sites of pilgrimage for Afro-Diasporic peoples, attracting thousands of visitors in search of homecoming and catharsis.[93] In *Lose Your Mother* (2008), Saidiya Hartman notes that these emotional needs are so prevalent, officials at Elmina and Cape Coast Castles have begun to provide visitors "certificates of pilgrimage, and African naming ceremonies" (163). They have also created a Door of No Return Ceremony, "a reenactment of the slave trade intended to mend the psychic wounds of the descendants of slaves" (*Lose Your Mother* 104).

[93] Visitors have included U.S. President Barack Obama and his family, who in 2013 made the journey to Senegal's Gorée Island, where the maison is located (Nakamura).

Serving a similar function at the maison, the Slavery Freedom Monument stands near the Door and declares the end of slavery, depicting a man raising unshackled arms while being embraced by a woman.[94] In thus cathecting Afro-Diasporic longings for remediation and closure onto architectural structures, officials at these castles frame "getting over" the Middle Passage as a physical ritual—a matter of acquiring a passport and plane ticket, and moving the body through symbolically weighted space. To visitors, the Doors promise a much-desired balm for historical trauma, for the past's wounding irruption into the present.

The emotional power of these sites cannot be denied; however, Trinidadian-Canadian author Dionne Brand cautions that the Door of No Return is not solely a geographic location. She argues that it is a *psychic* structure as well as a physical one—a traumatic primal scene that shapes all Afro-Diasporic experience. In her memoir, *A Map to the Door of No Return* (2002), she writes that this psychic Door "exists as an absence. A thing in fact which we do not know about, a place which we do not know. Yet it exists as the ground we walk. Every gesture our bodies make somehow gestures towards this Door" (*A Map* 25). Submerged within the consciousness of Afro-Diasporic peoples, the Door lingers as a sign of the unacknowledged, unremembered wounds inflicted by the Middle Passage and slavery. Transmitted from parent to child, it becomes a "haunting" (*A Map* 25), making its presence felt insidiously: in "tastes, habits, and styles" (*A Map* 204), in genealogical gaps, in historical silences, and in structures of feeling. The Door is

[94] Much of Hartman's scholarship focuses on African American roots tourism. The monument at Gorée, however, is indicative of the fact that visitors from throughout the African Diaspora value such sites as places of emotional and ancestral connection. Installed in 2002, it is of Guadeloupean, rather than Senegalese, provenance.

thus omnipresent, making a return to physical sites, at best, an incomplete means of achieving redress.[95]

Like other transgenerational traumas, the Door as Brand theorizes it remains, "hidden and intangible, relegated to secrecy and silence" (Schwab Loc. 625-28). Yet as the title of her memoir suggests, she takes it upon herself to "construct a map of the region" (*A Map* 19) through historical and cultural research.[96] These cartographic efforts are often frustrated by what Ann Cvetkovich labels the "missing archive" of slavery—a product of "generational distance" and the "inadequately documented, or more precisely, systematically undocumented" (38) experiences of enslaved subjects. Brand is thus forced to take a circuitous route, collecting the few traces she can find: "random shards of history and unwritten memoir" (*A Map* 19), passing references in colonial archives, and clues afforded by the "broken stones, bones, and carvings" (*A Map* 198) in museum collections. In effect, to map the Door, she accumulates her own archive, gathering, "what was left—even if it is an old sack, threadbare with time" (*A Map* 94). These fragments eventually inspire her second novel, *At the Full and Change of the Moon* (1999).

Brand's archival work reflects historiographical methods common to Afro-Diasporic studies, and has correspondences within theories of "working through" trauma. As Caribbean and African American scholars have long known, attempts to recover the

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[95] Brand grimly notes of her own journey to Africa that, "the idea of return presumes the certainty of love and healing, redemption and comfort. *But this is not return*" (*A Map* 90, emphasis original).
[96] She prefers the language of mapping because "[c]artography is description, not journey" (*A Map* 96). She disavows the romance of a return to lost African origins.

history of Afro-descended people in the New World require "excavations at the margins of monumental history [. . .] turning to forms of knowledge and practice not generally considered legitimate objects of historical inquiry" (*Scenes* 11). Such excavations have enabled powerful imaginative re-workings of Afro-Diasporic history—fiction, poetry, and art, that, as Matt Richardson puts it, "gives us the ability to say now what was unsayable then" (15), thus bringing suppressed pasts to bear on the present.[97] Using an archive to articulate the unspeakable is also a practice deployed by some trauma theorists in the process of narrativization, i.e. the reconstruction of traumatic events after the fact. Dominick LaCapra notes that for such individuals, the archive "is a stand-in for the past that brings the mystified experience of the thing itself" (*History and Criticism* 92)—the moment of trauma—so that one can, ideally, translate it into discourse and stop that moment's return in the present.[98]

Despite generating an archive of her own and using it to create an imaginative narrative, Brand is highly pessimistic that gathering "what was left" can aid the processes described by scholars like Richardson and LaCapra. She writes that the little she recovers is often "empty itself of meaning" (*A Map* 94) and whatever significance she attributes to it is thus "invented in absence" (*A Map* 199). Too much has been lost forever, making it

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[97] One of the most famous examples of imaginative works saying the unsayable is, of course, Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987). Significantly, while Brand is appreciative of Morrison's craft, she is skeptical of such work's emotional and political utility: "The dominant myth overwhelms Morrison's mythmaking, leaving her characters stranded in a kind of inevitable failure. In history. The daily bulletins of Black America seen through mass media encroach on the space of Morrison's narratives. She cannot write fast enough to counter them" (*A Map* 129).

[98] LaCapra cautions that this faith in written documents is problematic, for "writing and other inscriptions" are always open to question (92). For him, working through trauma means being able to "distinguish between the past and present and to recall in memory that something happened to one (or one's people) back then while realizing that one is living in the here and now with openings to the future" (*Writing and History* 22). For other theorizations of working through, see the work of Cathy Caruth and Dori Laub.

impossible for her to reconstruct the past in a way that satisfies her, or to overwrite oppressive histories once and for all. Poignantly, she states that the Door's "perpetual 'no' denies [. . .] relief, denies an ending or a reconciliation" (*A Map* 26). In other words, Brand argues that like those who visit the physical Doors expecting healing, those who trace the psychic Door to the archive in hopes of redressing historical trauma are likely to be disappointed.

This radical pessimism sets Brand apart from the novelists I've considered thus far in my dissertation. Michelle Cliff and Julia Alvarez use real and imagined archival materials to rework traumatic histories into narratives of resistance, healing, and/or belonging. In *At the Full,* Brand refuses to offer any remedy for the pain caused by the Door of No Return, maintaining that it is an irreparable wound. Her work thus forces us to consider a significant question: when faced with pasts that are impossible to reconstruct and that are, to borrow Gabriele Schwab's language from *Haunting Legacies* (2010), "beyond reparation and unforgiveable" (Loc. 1467-68), what political or emotional work can the archive do? It is with this question in mind that I turn to my analysis of *At the Full and Change of the Moon*.

Brand's novel is inspired by V.S. Naipaul's account in *The Loss of Eldorado: A History* (1969) of a rebellious slave woman named Thisbe (*A Map* 205). Spanning centuries, continents, and cultures, *At the Full* follows the ill-fated descendants of Marie Ursule, a slave woman who lived in Trinidad at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Like Thisbe, Marie Ursule stages a stunning act of resistance, convincing all of the slaves on her plantation to commit suicide by poison. And like Thisbe, Marie Ursule is

mutilated, tortured, and burned to death in retribution. However, her legacy lives on in her daughter Bola, who escapes from the plantation prior to Marie Ursule's rebellion. As an adult, Bola reproduces prolifically, taking numerous lovers and bearing children whom she keeps or gives away, "depending on a whim" (*At the Full* 69). Her progeny spread across the Americas and Europe, generating a family lineage so large and confused that relatives often cannot recognize each other. While these descendants know little of Marie Ursule, all are marked in some way by the lingering traumas of her enslavement.

In this chapter, I trace how three of those descendants—Eula, Young Bola, and Elder Bola—interact with their family's archival materials, a category in which I include documents, ghosts, and collective memories. Such items are scarce, and what does exist often proves illegible, prohibiting coherent narratives about the family's past from emerging. I argue that the purpose of archive in Brand's novel is thus *not* to reconstruct or work through historical trauma, but to drive home the fact that doing so is a privilege often denied to Afro-Diasporic peoples. In light of this, I suggest that de rigeur calls to linger on and testify to painful pasts must be carefully assessed to ensure they acknowledge communities for whom such work does not necessarily result in healing or justice. Furthermore, while Brand herself is compelled to face and articulate her experience of historical trauma, her novel suggests that Afro-Diasporic individuals who refuse that burden should not be stigmatized. I conclude my chapter with a meditation on her depictions of willful denial and forgetting as survival strategies available to subjects with few other resources, arguing that in the long shadow cast by the Door of No Return,

survival itself must be viewed as an act of resistance.

"SOMETHING TO PULL ME BACK": ARCHIVE AND AMBIVALENCE

> "Expecting to find direct and amplified reference to African women during the opening years of the Trade, the observer is disappointed time and again that this cultural subject is concealed beneath the mighty debris of the itemized account, between the lines of the massive logs of commercial enterprise that overrun the sense of clarity we believed we had gained concerning this collective humiliation."
> -Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book"

One of the most frustrating realities of the "missing archive" is that while the Triangular Trade and plantation economies produced an excess of documentation (in the form of ships' logs, bills of sale, legal contracts, etc.), these documents typically obscure more than they reveal about the lived experiences of black subjects. It is little surprise, then, that scholars working within Afro-Diasporic studies tend to have fraught relationships to archival collections.[99] Hartman writes about this struggle in *Scenes of Subjection* (1997). Describing the archive as a necessary evil, she advocates the reclamation of "archival materials for contrary purposes" (*Scenes* 10) while simultaneously cautioning that use of such materials may only reinforce their authority. Echoing Gayatri Spivak's assertions in "Can the Subaltern Speak?," Hartman suggests that this imperfect practice is the only means available to access the lives of the enslaved, to make visible the "violated body as human flesh" (*Scenes of Subjection* 74)—a flesh that is either absented from dominant histories or problematically co-opted by abolitionist

[99] Some scholars, such as M. Jacqui Alexander, eschew archives altogether. Alexander evacuates "the desire for written confirmation" (310), relying on Afro-Caribbean religious practices in order to access the past.

rhetorics.[100] In *Scenes*, she considers this reclamation of the archive a tentative first step toward "[r]edressive action," enabling "the transfiguration of the broken and ravenous body into a site of pleasure, a vessel of communication, and a bridge between the living and the dead for communities brutalized by slavery" (77). However, in the years since that work's publication, she has become far more fatalistic about the archive's political and emotional utility for Afro-Diasporic subjects. In her most recent book, *Lose Your Mother*, she writes that, "[t]o read the archive is to enter a mortuary; it permits one final viewing and allows for a last glimpse of persons about to disappear into the slave hold" (17). In other words, any redress offered by the archive is too little, too late.

Brand's own use of archives echoes the practice of reclamation advocated by Hartman in *Scenes*. In her memoir, Brand describes searching for what she calls "signs of exits from the Door of No Return" (*A Map* 204). She finds these signs in documents—such as a letter by King George III's geographer Thomas Jefferys (*A Map* 200-201) and a memoir by Martinican priest Père Labat (*A Map* 206)—and in physical artifacts.[101] A number of her discoveries make their way into the narrative of *At the Full*, which has prompted some scholars to claim that the novel's goal is to reconstruct and thus work through the traumatic past, or as Erika Johnson puts it, to close "the gap between

[100] Hartman writes that, "there is no access to the subaltern consciousness outside dominant representations or elite documents" (*Scenes* 10).

[101] She is fascinated by a "wicker sack where bitter cassava was drained of its poison," "an arrow whose head might have been stained with woorara" (*A Map* 198), and "an eighteenth-century prison dress worn by a woman who was once a slave" (*A Map* 205).

traumatic memory and narration" (par. 11).[102] Brand herself, however, cautions that *At the Full* cannot "breath [sic] on those bones" (*A Map* 199), suggesting that her use of archive in crafting the novel is not meant to be, nor can it be, redressive. This is borne out by an examination of the novel's *own* depiction of archives—a depiction that has received no scholarly attention to date—which paints a picture more in keeping with Hartman's assertions in *Lose Your Mother*. I contend that *At the Full*'s dramatization of archives suggests that, for some Afro-Diasporic subjects, critical reading and writing practices are not enough to make archives into sources of healing narratives. In some cases, the archive serves instead to make tangible just how much has been irrevocably lost.

In *At the Full*, the character with greatest access to materials typically considered archival (i.e. written documents) is Marie Ursule's great-great granddaughter Eula, born in Trinidad in 1957. Like Brand herself, Eula has left the island for Toronto, where she makes her permanent residence. Her voice emerges in the form of a blue airmail letter that she sends home to her deceased mother, "Dear Mama," describing the emotional toll that life in Canada has taken on her. The blue airmail letter, written on lightweight stationary that folds into a sealable envelope, and whose color renders the letter's contents illegible from the outside, is an important epistolary genre of the Caribbean Diaspora. As Alexis Gumbs notes, "It is the economic means through which grown up daughters send money home for their mothers, and for the daughters that they have sent

[102] For similar takes on *At the Full*, see Maureen Moynagh's "The Melancholic Structure of Memory in Dionne Brand's *At the Full and Change of the Moon*"; and Nandini Dhar's "Trauma, Mourning and Resistant Melancholia: Dionne Brand's *At the Full and Change of the Moon*."

away. It is the communicative means through which daughters reproduce love backwards through language" (33). In her letter, Eula is attempting to reproduce her entire family history backwards. Her writing chronicles her interactions with the family archive, describing her efforts to decipher the documents and stories she has collected. Throughout the letter, she vacillates restlessly between the desire for more and better records, and the desire for complete forgetting of the traumatic past.

Eula's primary motivation for going through family history is to gain a clearer sense of who she is and of her place in the world, thus combatting her feeling of alienation as a Caribbean migrant and Afro-diasporic subject. She fixates particularly on her genealogy—a form of family history that relies heavily on the archive for verification, drawing on documents such as birth and death certificates, marriage licenses, property deeds, etc. However, as the convoluted family tree that is *At the Full*'s frontispiece suggests, Eula's lineage is riddled with gaps and silences. At one point in her letter, she opines:

> I would like one single line of ancestry, mama. One line from me to you and farther back, but a line that I can trace. I don't know why I thought that or ask you. One line like the one in your palm with all the places where something happened and is remembered. I would like one line full of people who have no reason to forget anything, or forgetting would not help them or matter because the line would be constant, unchangeable. A line that I can reach for in my brain when I feel off kilter. Something to pull me back. (*At the Full* 246-47).

Eula's yearning for an unbroken and easily traceable family line is not unique; the lasting popularity of Haley's *Roots*, and the multiple genealogical television programs hosted by Henry Louis Gates, Jr., attest to the commonality of this desire among Afro-Diasporic

subjects.[103] Indeed, as Maureen Moynagh notes, genealogy is "the site of the trauma of slavery [. . .] simultaneously a figure for identity and a figure for the reiteration of loss" (62). Like so many others, Eula has a grasp primarily on the most recent of her family's history—there are simply no records to help her piece together "one single line of ancestry" back to her family's arrival in the Americas. In effect, this lack becomes her inheritance, and the archive becomes a *source* of trauma as well as a record of it.

The gaps in the archive thus pain Eula, but the few documents that do exist are also cause for psychic wounding. Although she has numerous unread letters from her sisters (*At the Full* 251), she focuses most extensively on the only ancestral document in her possession, a drawing made by Marie Ursule's daughter, Bola, "of a rock and an ocean and a far shore with sticks for someone swimming in the ocean" (*At the Full* 254). This drawing is "stained with roucou" (*At the Full* 252) and contains sand from Culebra Bay—Bola's dwelling place. Dear Mama somehow comes into possession of this drawing, and bequeaths it to Eula for safekeeping. While the younger woman knows the provenance of the drawing and its significance, for her it becomes a source of bitterness. She misplaces the document for some time, and upon finding it, calls it "nothing. Only an old yellowing paper" (*At the Full* 252), resenting its refusal to clarify her family's past: "She [Bola] had so many children, so many lovers, so much life, I wondered why this is all she drew" (*At the Full* 254). The drawing, in its minimalism, cannot satisfy Eula's desire for access to a complete history and as a result she mails it back to Trinidad.

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[103] To date, Gates has hosted four such series on PBS: *African American Lives* (2006), *African American Lives 2* (2008), *Faces of America* (2010), and *Finding Your Roots* (2012).

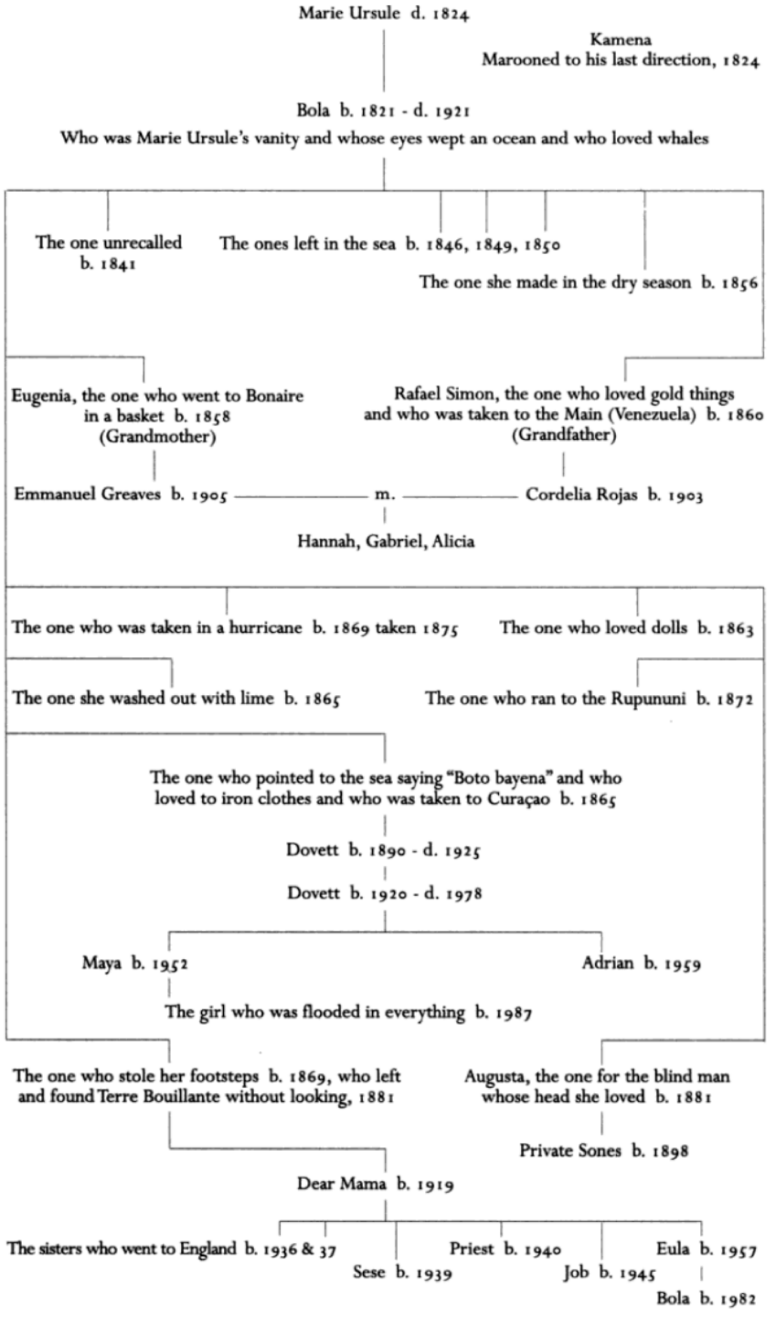

Figure 5: Plate 1, *At the Full and Change of the Moon*. © Grove Press, 1999.

While numerous scholars have noted the ways that institutional archives enact epistemic violence on minority subjects—namely, as Heather Love puts it, "the violence of obscurity, or annihilation from memory" (49)—Bola's drawing suggests erasure of a different sort.[104] It indicates that in Eula's case, her ancestor deliberately impoverished the family archive. Bola had valid reasons for refusing more detailed documentation, which I will examine in greater detail in the last section of this chapter; for Eula, however, the minimalism of the drawing reads as carelessness and neglect. In effect, by not inscribing her children into the archive with her drawing, Bola makes them vulnerable to the violence of obscurity and instantiates the gaps that trouble Eula's genealogy. Although the drawing stands as proof of Bola's existence, it gives so little access to her consciousness or life that it becomes a reminder of all that could have been preserved but was not. For Eula, the drawing is a kind of betrayal on Bola's part, an impoverishment of her descendants. It serves as an interdiction, a symbol of "something ungettable—a boundary" (*At the Full* 255) separating Eula from her own history and identity. It is perhaps no surprise that she comes to hate the drawing, and all remnants of the past.

This hatred extends to her own contribution to the family archive: her blue airmail letter, which she views with tremendous ambivalence. At times, she suggests that within herself she holds a viable, if fragile archive: "My forehead feels like thin paper, the kind you use to trace a figure on a map. I can hear it rustle under my fingers, if I let go it will

[104] See for example the works of Hartman, Richardson, and Cvetkovich; Wendy Walters' *Archives of the Black Atlantic*; and Ann Laura Stoler's *Haunted by Empire* and *Along the Archival Grain*.

pour into my hands, all of my thoughts and the thick oxidizing matter of me" (*At the Full* 234). She speculates that by giving shape to this archive in letters, she could write herself into cohesiveness: "if I had written enough words to you, perhaps I would save myself. If I had sent them to you instead of only writing them on the walls of subways in this city, perhaps I would hold myself together" (*At the Full* 256). Yet as her phrasing here suggests, she views her current letter as a much-belated and therefore futile effort to build a family archive for herself and future generations. Ultimately, she hopes her letter will be lost, misplaced, or forgotten "in a corner under the bed or next to the wardrobe behind the clothes basket" (*At the Full* 229). In addressing her letter to a dead woman (an illiterate one, at that) she gets her wish, and ironically replicates Bola's impoverishment of the family archive.

Eula's disillusionment is perhaps inevitable, as her longing for a cohesive archive seems to reflect a desire for origins, that which is "constant, unchangeable." I would suggest that Eula thus suffers from a distinctly racialized version of Derrida's mal d'archive, or archive fever, i.e. that "compulsive, repetitive, and nostalgic desire for the archive, an irrepressible desire to return to the origin, a homesickness, a nostalgia for the return to the most archaic place of commencement" (91).[105] For Derrida, the origin is the pre-linguistic, the experience of the thing itself, and thus an impossibility. For Eula, however the origin represents a sense of wholeness, belonging, and untraumatized identity—or, as Stuart Hall puts it, "a fullness or plenitude, to set against the broken

[105] Richardson also comments on this racialized mal d'archive, writing that as a result of centuries of erasure, "Black people have a fever for the archive" (5).

rubric of our past" (225). The tragedy of Eula's situation is that *this* kind of origin is neither impossible nor unthinkable. There are those in the Americas for whom the archive affirms belonging and continuity, but Eula is excluded from their number. *At the Full*'s depiction of archives thus drives home the fact that, due to historical forces outside of her control, this sense of completion is something denied Eula. Brand writes that "Too much has been made of origins. And so if I reject this notion of origins I have also to reject its mirror, which is the sense of origins used by the powerless to contest power in society" (*A Map* 69). Her novel thus insists that the archive, like the Door of No Return, cannot function as a source of relief, reconciliation, or empowerment. For Eula, and for Brand, the archive is yet another trauma with which Afro-Diasporic subjects must contend.

IN THE HOUSE OF SPIRITS: YOUNG BOLA'S GHOSTLY ARCHIVE

"The phantom which returns to haunt bears witness to the dead buried within the other."
-Nicolas Abraham, "Notes on the Phantom"

Eula's access to family documents, scarce and unsatisfying as they are, is a rarity in *At the Full*. Like many Afro-Diasporic subjects, most of Brand's characters must seek the past through "forms of knowledge and practice not generally considered legitimate objects of historical inquiry" (*Scenes* 11). These forms of knowledge and practice may include the concrete and everyday, such as food, stories, and music. They may also include the intangible—structures of feeling, patterns of silence, and most significantly in *At the Full*, ghosts. Spirits appear throughout Brand's novel: from the ghosts of the Ursuline nuns who provide Elder Bola with company, to Kamena's search for the spectral maroon community of Terre Bouillant, to Dear Mama's phantom sitting on Eula's bed in

the night, to the ghosts who populate Young Bola's house in Culebra Bay.

Ghosts have, of course, long been a significant trope in Afro-Diasporic literature and scholarship. As Avery Gordon puts it in *Ghostly Matters* (1997):

> [. . .] any people who are not graciously permitted to amend the past, or control the often barely visible structuring forces of everyday life, or who do not even secure the moderate gains from routine amnesia [. . .] that we all need in order to get through the days, is bound to develop a sophisticated consciousness of ghostly haunts and is bound to call for an "official inquiry" into them. (151)

Such inquiries have tended to view the ghost as embodying and/or providing access to unrecorded portions of the Afro-Diasporic past. The ghost as embodiment of the past is visible in works such as Toni Morrison's *Beloved*—to which *At the Full* has been compared—and is akin to what Hartman describes in *Lose Your Mother* as the kosanba, or the "come, go back, child" (86).[106] As it is conceived of in Ghana, the kosanba is born only to die, returning once again in spirit to its mother's womb, thus continuing the cycle ad infinitum. This ghostly child shuttles "back and forth between the worlds of the living and the dead because of stories not passed on, the ancestors not remembered, the things lost, and the debts not yet paid. The 'come, go back, child' braves the wreckage of history and bears the burdens that others refuse" (*Lose Your Mother* 86). In this formulation, the ghost is thus an embodiment of something that has been forgotten or elided—a sign of things that must be remembered and dealt with if the haunting is to cease.

In contrast, the ghost as imagined by scholars such as M. Jacqui Alexander actively assists in the processes of memory, providing histories that correct gaps created by dominant histories. Alexander draws on Afro-Caribbean religious practices to access

[106] Johnson suggests that Brand's novel is similar to "Toni Morrison's project of 'unforgetting'" (par. 3).

ancestral spirits, because she "surmised that cosmological systems housed memory, and that such memory was necessary to distill the psychic traumas produced under the grotesque conditions of slavery" (293). In this formulation, rather than serving solely as a sign of things forgotten, the ghost speaks, contributing to the narrativization of traumatic events. For Alexander, attending to the ghost's speech thus becomes an avenue for working through historical injury.

While the aforementioned ghosts are spectral entities, the ghost is also a common metaphor for the psychic phenomenon produced by trauma. The circumstances of this ghost's production, as conceived of by Nicolas Abraham and Mária Török in their work on "the phantom," overlap significantly with those iterated in Afro-Diasporic thought. According to Abraham and Török, the phantom is a product of transgenerational trauma, passed unconsciously from parent to child: "The buried speech of the parent will be (a) dead (gap) without a burial place in the child. This unknown phantom returns from the unconscious to haunt its host and may lead to phobias, madness, and obsessions. Its effects can persist through several generations and determine the fate of an entire family line" ("The Lost Object" 140, n.1). Like the kosanba, the phantom is a result of things left unsaid, or as Schwab puts it, "the 'unthought knowledge' of disavowed traumatic losses" (Loc. 169). However, unlike those haunted by the kosanba, the individuals haunted by the phantom typically fail to recognize it as a haunting. They are too far removed from, and often completely unaware of, the traumatic experience that produced the phantom. And unlike Alexander's ancestral spirits, because the phantom emerges from the unconscious, it refuses to speak clearly, making it incredibly difficult to interpret or appease.

Significantly, all of these theories suggest that the ghost is linked to discourse—to "stories not passed on," to memory, and to "buried speech." As such, the ghost can be said to serve a documentary function, providing information or signaling that information has been lost or deliberately withheld. While a number of scholars have convincingly asserted that the presence of ghosts in *At the Full* is a form of melancholic political resistance—or what LaCapra calls a "commemoration or memorial" (*Writing History* 22) for the traumatized dead—I would suggest that the linkage between ghosts and discourse sketched out above indicates that ghosts in *At the Full* can also be read as a kind of archive, particularly in the case of Young Bola.[107] Unfortunately, while Young Bola's ghostly archive is more extensive than the physical one in Eula's possession, it remains largely illegible for the reasons elaborated by Abraham and Török. Bola's chronological distance from the moment of trauma, combined with her family's silence and her own social isolation, make it impossible for her to "read" the ghosts she encounters—which means that this archive, like Eula's, is incapable of providing healing or redress.

Young Bola's haunted status is legible almost immediately, as she is repeatedly linked to the dead, the forgotten, and the silenced. She shares a name with an ancestor (Elder Bola) of whom she has no knowledge, is raised in Trinidad without ever learning that her "mother," Dear Mama, is actually her *grand*mother, and is entirely unaware that Eula exists and is her real mother. Upon Dear Mama's death, Young Bola takes upon herself the task of perpetual mourning, or as she describes it, remembering. While the rest

[107] Moynagh, likewise, claims that the novel "endeavors to accommodate the dead that dominant narratives of modernity refused to accommodate" (57). Dhar also suggests that in "'taking the dead' along with her,'" Brand creates a "public language by which the violence and loss of colonialism and slavery can be mourned" (35).

of her family in Culebra Bay moves on, Bola asks "[w]as our mother someone to be forgotten and abandoned just so, just because she had died? I could not believe it" (*At the Full* 271). As a result of her remembering, Young Bola begins to see Dear Mama's ghost: "After some years my belief and devotion paid off because my mother came out and sat beside me on her grave" (*At the Full* 266). Eventually, Young Bola and Dear Mama retreat to the family home, which has been left to fall into ruin. There, they refuse to acknowledge the passage of time, enjoying each other's company and encountering other ghosts from the family's past. As a result, the residents of Culebra Bay shun Young Bola and label her mad. Entombed in her haunted house, Bola becomes the guardian of *all* the family's phantoms, de facto curator of the ghostly archive.

This narrative, strange and evocative as it is, has understandably drawn a good deal of scholarly attention. Young Bola's retreat from the world of the living has often been read as a politicized rejection of futurity. Grandison, for instance, suggests that Bola is exerting her agency with her decision to withdraw, "however damaging the decision may be" (777). Gumbs goes further, arguing that Young Bola's retreat is legible as a queer act: "embodying stasis and death, never progressing toward reproductivity, instead [she] become[s] a disturbance, an exception that makes logic fall apart—a queer girl" (32).[108] However, Young Bola's actions, like the novel as a whole, have most commonly been read in terms of melancholic resistance. Johnson, for example, argues that Young Bola's "exilic existence in her haunted house is an act of unforgetting. Young Bola

[108] The critique of futurity has, of course, been a significant thread in queer theory since the publication of Lee Edelman's *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* in 2004.

provides hospitality for the ghosts; she listens to them and lives with them, sustaining their presence in the world" (par. 27). While readings such as Johnson's are compelling, they ignore the more troubling aspects of Young Bola's ghostly archive.

Although Young Bola certainly "provides hospitality" for the ghosts, I would suggest that this hospitality, this "unforgetting" does not—and perhaps cannot—translate into understanding. Like Eula, Young Bola can use her archive only to trace the most immediate of family history; Dear Mama is the sole ghost that speaks directly to her, and is the only spirit that she recognizes. The other ghosts who wander in and out of the house are there to visit Dear Mama rather than Bola: "Our mother had visitors *of her own* now and then" (*At the Full* 280, emphasis added). These ghosts rarely interact with Young Bola, and while we as readers recognize them, Bola cannot. For example, when Dear Mama's father arrives in the form of a young boy, Bola listens to his conversations with Dear Mama, but never acknowledges him as her great-grandfather. Ultimately, she decides that he is "a dream only [. . .] the boy was not real" (*At the Full* 281). Other ghosts appear and disappear without speaking at all, such as Elder Bola's son who was swept away by a hurricane (*At the Full* 287). These ghosts, rather than bringing the past to the present in a constructive way, as Johnson suggests, seem to function like Abraham and Török's phantom. Young Bola provides them hospitality in the sense that *she is their host*—they emerge from her, as they have been interred in her unconscious by generations of family silence. As such, she cannot recognize them or make sense of their meaning, and thus she cannot incorporate them into conscious memory. If she sustains their presence in the world, it is only as continued traces of things forgotten, signs of

"buried speech."

The limits of Young Bola's ghostly archive become most painfully clear during Bola's encounter with the spirit of Marie Ursule, the family's progenitor, whose enslavement, abuse, and death set in motion later generations' sense of traumatization. Like the majority of the ghosts who visit the haunted house at Culebra Bay, Marie Ursule goes unrecognized by Young Bola. Significantly, however, Marie Ursule *also* fails to recognize Young Bola:

> One of my mother's visitors, a lady, came limping to our house as if one foot was sore. I gave her a place to sit on a stool in a cool corner of the house, and a glass of water for the heat. She had a heavy ring around her ankle and a rope around her throat. I loosened the rope, I fanned her as I had fanned our mother when the sun was too hot. She sat and began humming a nice tune. I asked her what tune was that and would she teach me. *She looked right through me. She kept humming as if I had not asked*, the sort of tune our mother used to sing to me when I was falling asleep. (*At the Full* 285, emphasis added)

Unlike Alexander's ancestral spirits, Marie Ursule cannot or will not offer an accounting of herself—not even to teach Young Bola her sorrow song. And although Young Bola, sensing something familiar about this ghost, attempts to ease its physical pains, those efforts seem to go unnoticed by Marie Ursule. The latter remains shackled, and the rope, though loosened, remains around her neck. While the two women might occupy a shared space, this encounter suggests that the ghostly archive can neither bring the past to the present, nor rectify the sufferings of the dead. Instead, like the written archive, it serves as a reminder that something of Afro-Diasporic history has been permanently lost.

While Young Bola seems unperturbed by her perpetually haunted status, claiming that, "I am as content as I have never been" (*At the Full* 285), for the residents of Culebra

Bay she becomes a figure of horror.[109] She is labeled "crazy" (*At the Full* 276), and on the few occasions she leaves the house she is immediately chased back by townspeople. This social rejection further ensures that her ghostly archive remains illegible. Gordon suggests that "[. . .] the ghost must be collectively exorcised so that [. . .] if the *dead* start to take the *living* back to the past, *it is connected to the labor aimed at creating in the present a place (a past or future), a something that must be done*" (182-83, emphasis original). Young Bola, excluded from the collective, has no one to help her exorcise the ghosts or determine what must be done. Although Eula, Young Bola's aunts, and the other residents of Culebra Bay might help her read the ghostly archive, they refuse that responsibility, leaving Bola to bear the burdens of history alone.

In bearing this burden, Young Bola becomes ghost-like herself. Hartman has cautioned that, "the work of mourning is not without its perils" and asked whether we can "mourn the dead without becoming them?" (*Scenes* 771). Young Bola's fate seems a troubling answer to that question, as she claims to have "turned to a ghost" (*At the Full* 278). In becoming ghostly and entombing herself within her haunted house, I would argue that Young Bola occupies a space in Culebra Bay similar to what Abraham and Török describe as "the crypt." Within an individual, the crypt is "a sealed-off psychic space [. . . .] comparable to the formation of a cocoon around the chrysalis" ("Lost

[109] One could argue that Young Bola is exhibiting introjection as theorized by Török. Elizabeth Freeman, in *Time Binds* (2010) notes that Török conceives of introjection in such a way that the subject can be "haunted by bliss and not just by trauma; residues of positive affect (idylls, utopias, memories of touch) might be available for queer counter- (or para-) historiographies" (Loc. 1874). The specter of Dear Mama would certainly appear to be a residue of positive affect, although her generational proximity to Young Bola means that any counter-history she might help generate would be relatively limited in scope. The other ghosts that haunt Young Bola, however, are clearly the result of trauma.

Object" 141), and in which "unspeakable words buried alive are held fast" ("Topography" 159-60). Significantly, Schwab has suggested that the crypt is not unique to the individual psyche: "there can be collective crypts, communal crypts, and even national crypts" (Loc. 681-82). Young Bola's house and its ghostly archive are a communal crypt, containing that which is unspeakable for her family and for the people of Culebra Bay: the terrors of enslavement and captivity.

Ultimately, Young Bola's story demonstrates the ways in which unconventional or alternative archives of the African Diaspora are plagued by the same problems as official archives. Although the ghost might be legible as a sign of loss, Brand suggests that like written records, it cannot help to fill the gaps of collective memory. To borrow Moynagh's language, the ghostly archive cannot help to "translate complaints into plaints" (65) so that loss can be quantified and narrativized. Furthermore, in demonstrating the social and mental toll that the ghostly archive takes on Young Bola, Brand "queries the theoretical demand that 'we' live with ghosts" (Kulperger 116)—underscoring the costs of engaging with unhealable pasts. Like her mother, Eula, Young Bola's encounters with history make it impossible for her to live in the present, or to imagine a future. Indeed, if there is a future implied in Young Bola's narrative, it appears to be a future very much like the present: haunted by unremembered ghosts, and marked by the continuance of transgenerational traumas.

RADICAL PRESENTNESS: ELDER BOLA AND THE PRAXIS OF FORGETTING

> "Why need we remember? Does the emphasis on remembering and working through the past expose our insatiable desires for curatives, healing, and anything else that proffers

> the restoration of some prelapsarian intactness? Or is recollection an avenue for undoing history [. . . .] [o]r is it that remembering has become the only conceivable or viable form of political agency?" –Saidiya Hartman, "The Time of Slavery"

The plights of the two aforementioned characters reflect one of the central tensions of Brand's novel: the pull between memory and forgetting. It is to these two concepts that I wish to turn in this final portion of my essay. Within postcolonial and critical race studies, forgetting is typically—and rightfully—attributed to the forces of racism and imperialism, which claim that there is nothing to be remembered in the first place. As Hartman puts it, "Never did the captive choose to forget; she was always tricked or bewitched or coerced into forgetting. Amnesia, like an accident or a stroke of bad fortune, was never an act of volition" (*Lose Your Mother* 155). This coerced amnesia becomes self-perpetuating, to the point that "we even forget that we have forgotten" (Alexander 276). Forgetting, then, is conceived of as both a tactic of oppression, and as a result of traumatic events that must be overcome.

In contrast, remembering is associated—again, rightfully—with political agency and/or working through trauma.[110] Generations of Caribbean and African Diasporic thinkers have emphasized the political and emotional importance of remembering the history of enslavement. Édouard Glissant, for instance, exhorts the Caribbean writer to "'dig deep' into his memory, following the latent signs he has picked up in the everyday world" (64) in order to rework collective memory. Likewise, Alexander positions "memory as an antidote to alienation, separation, and the amnesia that domination

[110] Derrida argues that, "there is no political power without the control of archive, *if not of memory*" (4, emphasis added).

produce" (14).[111] These scholarly practices have, of course, translated into literary ones, with neo-slave narratives such as Maryse Condé's *I, Tituba* (1986), Simone Schwarz-Bart's *The Bridge of Beyond* (1974), and Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987)—to name only a few—imagining the voices of African Diasporic subjects erased from dominant histories.

There is also a strong scholarly movement toward depathologizing melancholia and the refusal to let go of the past, particularly among oppressed populations. This perpetual melancholy becomes a mode of resistant politics, insisting that elided histories must be remembered. As David L. Eng and David Kazanjian argue in *Loss*, "a continuous engagement with loss and its remains [. . . .] generates sites for memory and history, for the rewriting of the past and the reimaging of the future [. . . .] melancholia's continued and open relationship to the past finally allows us to gain new perspectives and new understandings of lost objects" (4).[112] Sam Durant, in *Postcolonial Narrative and the Work of Mourning*, even goes so far as to suggest that a melancholic refusal to forget and move on is "a way of ensuring that history does not repeat itself" (9). Remembering, and/or the refusal to forget thus become avenues to communal empowerment, justice, and futurity.

At the Full certainly depicts forgetting as a result of colonial and racist

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[111] Glissant and M. Jacqui Alexander are obviously only two of the more prominent examples of Afro-Diasporic scholars advocating the political necessity of remembering. Hartman, Holland, E. Kamau Brathwaite, Derek Walcott, and scores of others have likewise written on the subject.

[112] Schwab echoes this sentiment: "mourning is not a melancholic attachment to injury but, on the contrary, prepares the ground for a future-oriented integration of the past" (Loc. 241-42). Queer scholars have also taken up this praxis of melancholia in earnest, particularly thinkers such as Love, Douglas Crimp, Judith Halberstam, and Elizabeth Freeman.

oppression, and via its depiction of Marie Ursule's life and death, it also engages with the project of remembering. Fascinatingly, however, Brand has suggested that "this novel is about forgetting" (*A Map* 198), and the novel itself asserts that, "[f]orgetfulness is true speech if anyone listens" (*At the Full* 18). I find these links between forgetting, speech, and writing evocative, as they suggest that forgetting is a type of discourse—and therefore potentially a type of agency. While this seems counter-intuitive, I would suggest that these connections hint at the possibility that purposeful refusal of the past can function as a political praxis for some African Diasporic subjects post-slavery. As Richardson suggests, "part of the effect of trauma is not only to keep elements of the past hidden but also, as an added measure of self-protection, to *disremember* them—to erase them from collective memory" (10, emphasis original). *At the Full* presents the reader with multiple characters for whom this kind of disremembering is a necessary, and often, successful survival strategy, allowing them to deflect the crippling sorrows of transgenerational trauma in order to claim themselves in the present.

The most significant of these characters is Elder Bola, daughter of Marie Ursule and artist of the drawing that so frustrates Eula. Just before she commits her final act of resistance, Marie Ursule sends Elder Bola away from Mon Chagrin [My Shame] plantation, entrusting her to a male slave named Kamena.[113] He carries her to Culebra Bay, and she finds safety in the ruins of an Ursuline convent where Marie Ursule had once been enslaved. There, she is largely left to her own devices, with only occasional

[113] In yet another instance of fragmented genealogies, it is possible that Kamena is Elder Bola's father, though it is never confirmed. On the family tree, he is relegated to one side, never connected directly to Marie Ursule or Elder Bola.

visits from Kamena. The sea and the ghosts of the Ursuline nuns are her primary companions throughout childhood. Although Kamena tells Elder Bola stories about Marie Ursule's sufferings under slavery, as well as her violent death, she grows up seemingly untraumatized. Brand writes of Elder Bola that, "suffering would skip her generation, she didn't have the patience for it. She only knew it like something welling in her eyes and singing 'Marie Ursule,' and she only knew how to put it from her mind" (*At the Full* 69). In other words, Elder Bola, only one generation removed from slavery, consciously chooses to forget the past in order to continue her day-to-day life.

That life is dedicated to existing fully and luxuriously in her own body. Brand writes that Elder Bola:

> . . . .was not faithful to sorrow only to a muscular yearning for everything her eyes touched. What her eyes touched she craved, craving raw like a tongue, and pinned to one look, one shadow, one movement of an almond leaf, one wave, one man, one woman with a fish basket, one moment. And as soon forgotten. She moved to the next lust, forgetting the one she'd just hungered for and thought she would die without [. . . .] lust for her own flesh. She would knead her soft thighs and smooth them in her fingers for hours. (*At the Full* 67)

In staying faithful to these muscular yearnings and lusts, and in immediately forgetting them, Elder Bola engages in a radical presentness, rejecting the accretion of memory and history. Julia Grandison has suggested that this presentness is a kind of "revisionary agency" (776), and I am inclined to agree.[114] In light of Marie Ursule's captivity, Elder Bola's claiming of her own flesh—in what seems an important nod to Hortense Spiller's use of "flesh" to designate "liberated subject-positions" (67)—is a truly radical act. Elder

[114] Marlene Goldman offers a slightly different take on Elder Bola's seeming flightiness, suggesting that "Bola's acceptance of flux and change can be viewed as a rejection of accumulation and possession—fixations that motivate both the slave owners and, in many cases, their victims" (20).

Bola's dedication to the ephemeral sensory and erotic pleasures afforded by her own flesh is the antithesis of her mother's hatred of the body as a source of recurring pain, "a terrible thing that wanted to live no matter what" (*At the Full* 17). Elder Bola's refusal of the past is thus legible as a kind of personal victory over the structures that so oppressed Marie Ursule.

Scholars have, understandably, struggled with Elder Bola's forgetting, primarily for its negative effects on her many children. She forgets these children "when they walked beyond the flame trees, beyond the outskirts of her thinking" (*At the Full* 68), cares for them sporadically, and refuses to divulge what she knows of her mother's life. As a result they scatter throughout the Americas and struggle with identity and belonging. Grandison, while acknowledging the agency Bola enacts via such behavior, calls it "arguably sociopathic and familially disruptive" (776). Johnson, in contrast, argues that Elder Bola is a colonial "mother-of-forgetting," "a figure of colonized consciousness who cannot pass on to her children their own histories, or, by extension, a communal, ethnic, or national history" (par. 19). While I certainly find it difficult to condone Elder Bola's haphazard mothering, I would like to push back against such readings in order to consider the politics of her forgetting.

Johnson's suggestion that Elder Bola *cannot* pass history on to her children robs Bola of agency—it is not that she cannot, but that she *will not*. Her forgetting is not an effect of colonial epistemologies or coercion. It is a deliberate choice, and one that she would not have been alone in making so soon after Emancipation. As Ron Eyerman notes, "many, if not most, former slaves wanted to forget the past and look toward a new,

more open future" (33). Indeed, the other residents of Culebra Bay share Bola's desire to forget: "There was enough time in the future for recounting but all they really wanted to do was go on, advance into their next years, which had to be sweeter, and were, just by the fact that they were at Culebra Bay" (*At the Full* 64). Elder Bola's forgetting, like that of the other residents of Culebra Bay, thus functions as a mode of survival and as a community politics.

And while Grandison is correct that Bola's forgetting is familially disruptive, it is also decidedly *productive*. Brand has suggested that forgetting, when one is only one or two generations removed from slavery, is both "urgent" (*A Map* 223) and a gift: "It was a gift. Forgetting. The only gift that one, the one bending reluctantly toward the opening, could give" (*A Map* 224). Elder Bola witnesses Kamena's obsession with and eventual consumption by the past, and rejects that path: "he was burnt up with walking and dried away with crying, starved with remembering" (*At the Full* 60). Refusing the past allows Bola to survive, carry on, and lay claim to the present. In turn, her presentness, her indulging of sensory pleasures, produces a formidably large family that spreads across the globe. This, too, is a gift—the gift of survival, which Audre Lorde has argued "is the greatest gift of love. Sometimes, for Black mothers, it is the only gift possible (149-50). Bola's fecundity assures the continuation of the family line, and is in stark contrast to Marie Ursule, who "had vowed never to bring a child into this world" (*At the Full* 8). This is a powerful form of resistance to New World structures that for centuries have attempted to deny and eradicate black subjectivity, and it suggests that, like remembering, *forgetting* is linked to futurity.

This is not to suggest, of course, that the future instantiated by this forgetting is idyllic—though I would argue, neither is the future instantiated by remembering. In terms of political praxis, it is clear that Bola's forgetting is a useful strategy for herself and those who, like her, can be satisfied with an existence centered on the present. It is equally clear that not everyone can engage in this kind of presentness, as her ability to evade trans-generational trauma is not passed on to all of her descendants. The trauma she refuses is merely deferred, reappearing generations after the fact in figures such as Eula and Young Bola. Elder Bola herself appears to recognize this inevitability: "'Life will continue,' she tells the children, 'no matter what it seems, and even after that *someone will remember you*. And even after that it could be just the whiff or thought of things you loved.' It is her hopelessness and her skill. Her faith *doesn't believe in endings*" (*At the Full* 297-8, emphases added). If Young Bola's remembering precipitates forgetting, then Elder Bola's forgetting thus seems to engender a kind of memory, affirming Paul Ricoeur's assertion in *Memory, History, Forgetting* (2004) that "forgetting is no longer . . . in every respect an enemy of memory" (Loc. 6133). Brand's novel suggests that, far from being enemies, forgetting and remembering are parts of the same psychic and historical process.

Elder Bola's narrative, like so much of *At the Full*, offers no clear way to recuperate the trans-generational traumas of the Middle Passage and slavery. It does, however, function to de-familiarize forgetting as it has been characterized within postcolonial studies, critical race studies, and theories of trauma. Perhaps even more radically, Brand suggests the ways that exhortations to remember must be critically

examined in order to consider their cost—which the fates of Kamena and Young Bola so potently illustrate—and the psychic needs of individual African Diasporic subjects. Ultimately, *At the Full* indicates that memory and forgetting, far from being in opposition, are better conceived of as complementary modes of survival and political resistance.

CONCLUSION

As I bring this chapter to a close, I am torn. Much of my thinking here was prompted by what I saw as a strange insistence on redemptive readings in extant writing about *At the Full and Change of the Moon*. While scholars were fully prepared to acknowledge the lack of either nostalgia or utopian vision in Brand's novel, many seemed compelled to offer recuperative interpretations, to suggest at least provisional forms of resolution and healing. Moynagh, for instance, suggests that even though Brand's characters may not work through the traumas engendered by Marie Ursule's enslavement, we as readers "are arguably the ones who undertake the work of mourning in our reading of this novel" (62). This is a comforting thought, and I sympathize with such readings. As Hartman suggests, "[t]he event of captivity and enslavement engenders the necessity of redress" (*Scenes* 77). Wounds cry out to be healed; we long to enact justice and un-do the damages caused by history.

Yet as Hartman also notes, and as the lives of Brand's characters illustrate, in the case of slavery redress inevitably fails. This failure engenders a "constancy of repetition" (*Scenes* 77), or what LaCapra calls an "acting out" in which individuals who are

generations and geographies removed from slavery are "haunted or possessed by the past and performatively caught up in the compulsive repetition of traumatic scenes" (*Writing History* 21).[115] In other words, the old wounds reopen, crying out once more for a redress that is bound to fail, leaving characters like Eula and Young Bola struggling in the present. According to Brand, the lives of her characters—and the lives of Afro-Diasporic subjects at large—are overdetermined by Marie Ursule's tragedy, and by the Door of No Return. As she puts it, the Door exists "without prompting. It exists despite all efforts to obscure it or change it or reinterpret it by its carpenters or its passengers" (*A Map* 72). Scholarly insistence that Brand's novel somehow can or should "work through" such an indelible trauma thus seems overly optimistic and shortsighted.

How, then, are we to interpret Brand's deployment of archives and engagement with the past in *At the Full*? If the past cannot be healed or undone, if remembering brings only pain, why engage with the archive? I would suggest that for Brand, the archive provides a way to illustrate the extent of the damages done by the Middle Passage and slavery. Rather than forcing narratives of healing, which for the sake of good feelings risk underestimating structures of oppression that continue to endanger black subjects, Brand lingers on the traces of trauma, on the wound. The archive affords a means of probing this wound, illuminating its realities and complexities, and insisting that readers acknowledge just how much has been permanently lost. As Hartman recommends, Brand

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[115] Eyerman makes a similar suggestion: "The meaning and memory of slavery are still unresolved, however, as is the cultural trauma. Perhaps it will never be resolved, there may be no resolution as the collective identity of black Americans, as opposed to individual memory, is filtered through cultural trauma, which means that slavery, the primal scene of the collective, will be recalled every time the collective is questioned" (221).

demands the recognition of loss "not by way of a simulated wholeness but precisely through the recognition of the amputated body in its amputatedness" (*Scenes* 74). Such recognition is bitter but necessary, forcing a concession that some wrongs can never be made right; some traumas can never be healed. In this recognition is also an accusation of collective guilt. New World subjects are indebted to—and in many cases complicit in—this amputatedness, to the systems of economic and racial terror that made colonization of the Americas possible. Brand has said bluntly that, "It is not the job of writers to lift our spirits. Books simply do what they do [. . .] [w]hen you think that you are in the grace of a dance you come upon something hard [. . . .] [p]erhaps myth and allegory are worn out, perhaps they fail as imaginative devices. But so too reality" (*A Map* 134). In its refusal of healing narratives, and its insistence that basic survival is an act of resistance for Afro-Diasporic subjects, *At the Full* demands that readers, like Brand's characters, confront the persistent wounding that is life in the New World.

Chapter 4: "'Nothing ever ends'": Archives of Testimony and Images in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*

"'I like human endings,' says Junot Díaz. 'For me, human endings are ones that represent the full complexity of what I consider human experience. For me, the consequences of surviving sometimes give you great pause.'"
—Ruby Cutolo, "Guns and Roses"

Fifty years to the date after the assassination of Dominican dictator Rafael Leónidas Trujillo, officials dedicated the Museo Memorial de la Resistencia Dominicana (Memorial Museum of the Dominican Resistance) in the nation's capital, Santo Domingo. On its website, the Museo is described as: ". . .un recinto para commemorar a los caídos en las luchas democráticas" [. . . a site commemorating those fallen in the democratic struggles].[116] There are many such fallen, given the Trujillato's systemic and violent repression of political adversaries. Official estimates suggest that at least twenty thousand people died at the hands of the regime's operatives; there were perhaps many thousands more, since an accurate casualty count from the 1937 massacre of Haitian migrants and Haitian-Dominicans—known variously as the Perejil (Parsley) massacre, El Corte (the Cut), or Kouto-a (the Knife)—was never taken (Derby 268).[117] In its effort to honor these caídos, the Museo insists on making their lived experiences accessible to the public. To that end, exhibits include video testimonials from survivors and thousands of documents detailing the regime's activities—even, devastatingly, photographs of torture

[116] All translations mine unless indicated otherwise.

[117] In 1937, Trujillo ordered the deaths of Haitian migrants and Haitian-Dominicans living near the Republic's western border. This event is dubbed the Parsley massacre as a result of reports that Dominican soldiers would ask victims to pronounce perejil in order to determine whether they were Afro-Dominican or Haitian. Speakers whose first language was Kreyòl tended to have difficulty pronouncing the "r" sound, and were summarily murdered. I have found estimates of the Haitian death toll ranging from a few hundred to thirty thousand.

victims seated in one of Trujillo's infamous "tronos" (thrones), or electric chairs. The Museo likewise catalogues Sitios de Memoria (Sites of Memory) throughout the Dominican Republic where heroes such as the Mirabal sisters lived and died, thus connecting the regime's crimes to the nation's geography in public consciousness. It also offers visitors the opportunity to add new names to the lists of murdered, disappeared, imprisoned, and tortured, so that those lives, too, can be remembered.

Like other institutions dedicated to preserving histories of atrocity—the Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C., for instance—the Museo's engagement with the past is simultaneously future-oriented, seeking to address historical trauma so that the nation can move forward. The mission statement for the Museo's NUNCA MAS (Never Again) project is illustrative:

> . . .solicitamos y firmamos por la creación de la Comisión de la Verdad, con el objetivo de que se encargue de efectuar, mediante una metodología objetiva y transparente, que tenga la tarea de investigar, registrar y tipificar—de naturaleza jurídico-política—las violaciones de derechos humanos cometidos por la Dictadura de Rafael L. Trujillo Molina, que aún hoy—50 años después de finalizada la infame era de terror—marcan la vida nacional [. . . .] Solamente así podremos estar seguros de que NUNCA MAS en la República Dominicana se repetirá un regimen tan aberrante.
>
> . . . we request and sign for the creation of a Truth Commission, with the responsibility of carrying out an investigation, using objective and transparent means, to register and classify—of juridical-political nature—the human rights violations committed by the dictatorship of Rafael L. Trujillo Molina, that even today—fifty years after the end of the infamous era of terror—mark national life [. . . .] Only thus can we be sure that a regime so perverse will NEVER AGAIN reappear in the Dominican Republic.

The language of "never again" is by now a familiar—and too often impotent—refrain, chanted by the international community after human rights violations. In the Dominican

Republic, however, this language is part of an ongoing struggle among Dominicans to reimagine the nation and Dominican identity post-Trujillo.

As the Museo's statement acknowledges, such a task is difficult—the dictator's lingering grip on national life ensures that even today he has his supporters and apologists. Indeed, in the wake of the Museo's opening, the dictator's grandson, Ramfis Domínguez-Trujillo, announced plans for a virtual Museo Generalisimo Trujillo (General Trujillo Museum). Although these plans have not come to fruition, the Museo Generalisimo was intended to honor the dictator, to "challenge parts of the historical record," and to "tap a quiet undercurrent of nostalgia for Trujillo" (Archibold).[118] Although clearly problematic, Domínguez-Trujillo's plans just as clearly share the Museo Dominicana's interest in bringing the nation's history to bear on its present and its future.[119] While the Museo Dominicana's image of the Trujillato seems most likely to prevail in public memory, the rhetorical struggle these two camps represent has characterized Dominican life for the past half-century.

Indeed, these dueling museos reflect a larger Dominican cultural phenomenon that Lauren Derby, in *The Dictator's Seduction* (2009), labels "face work."[120] She claims that face work was a by-product of the Trujillato:

> . . . it was close to impossible to cast oneself as an honorable subject resisting Trujillo and his depredations; a political subject was then forced to resort to face-

[118] As of this writing, the Museo Generalisimo's website is defunct. However, the family continues to operate the Fundación Rafael Leónidas Trujillo Molina (Rafael Leónidas Trujillo Molina Foundation), which likewise seeks to recuperate the dictator's image among the Dominican people.

[119] While Domínguez-Trujillo acknowledges that his grandfather was a dictator, he contends that "the death toll ascribed to him is inflated" and that "his grandfather's efforts to modernize the Dominican Republic [. . .] are overlooked in favor of his 'excesses'" (Archibold).

[120] She borrows the term from Erving Goffman's *Interaction Ritual: On Face-to-Face Behavior* (1982).

> saving strategies when a gaping abyss opened between the self one wished to be and the one he or she had become. For some this created a kind of split identity, a gap between one's self and person, one's view of oneself and one's public face, one's past and one's present, that took much face work to reconcile. (11)

As the museos indicate, a similar kind of face work has also come to characterize Dominican public life post-Trujillo as the nation attempts to reconcile its bloody past with the future it would like for itself. Post-Trujillo literature produced about the regime—both on the island and in diaspora—has been an integral part of this ongoing face work. Indeed, as Marta Caminero-Santangelo and Roy C. Boland Osegueda suggest in their introduction to "Moving Stories: Trauma and the Migrating Trujillo Narrative," a 2009 special issue of *Antípodas*, "the continued production and global circulation of literary narratives about Trujillo have served the function of constructing his thirty-one years in power as a cultural trauma—one which, for all the many pages written about it, has yet to be fully worked through" (3). Many of these literary narratives take the form of metatestimonio, a term I borrow from Nereida Segura-Rico. According to Segura-Rico, metatestimonial novels echo testimonio's desire to voice victims' experiences. However, the genre is also deeply concerned with "the illocutionary aspects of the testimonial, that is, on the issue of who talks and for whom . . . [t]his function allows these texts to call attention to their own status as fictions while at the same time blurring the division between fiction and reality" (Segura-Rico 175-76). Segura-Rico includes two distinct subgenres of literature within the category of metatestimonio: the testimonial novel and the novela del dictador (dictator novel).

As its name suggests, the testimonial novel is told from the perspective of victims

(real or imagined) in an attempt to enact healing and correct silenced histories. Conversely, the novela del dictador focuses on the corrupt inner workings of regimes. Segura-Rico suggests that both forms grant "the novel a special status in uncovering hidden truths" about the past, although the testimonial novel is also likely to grant literature "the power to straighten the wrongs of history, to heal the wounds of the past by the sheer force of a creative will" (181). Unsurprisingly, the violent excesses of the Trujillato have inspired metatestimonial novels in both veins. Julia Alvarez's *In the Time of the Butterflies* (1994), told from the perspective of the assassinated Mirabal sisters, as well as Jacques Stephen Alexis' *Compère general soleil* (*General Sun, My Brother*) (1955) and Edwidge Danticat's *The Farming of Bones* (1998), both told from the perspective of Haitian Dominicans during the Perejil Massacre, are famous examples of the first subcategory of metatestimonio. Mario Vargas Llosa's *Fiesta del chivo* (*Feast of the Goat*) (2001), which focuses on the final days of the Trujillo regime and the aftermath of the dictator's assassination, is a well-known example of the latter category.

While Junot Díaz's Pulitzer-prize winning novel *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007) has typically been considered exemplary of another Latin American literary form—magical realism—I would suggest that this text also fits within the metatestimonio tradition.[121] Scholars have often focused on the seemingly magical nature

[121] See, for example: Daniel Bautista's "Comic Book Realism: Form and Genre in Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*"; Ramón Saldívar's "Historical Fantasy, Speculative Realism, and Postrace Aesthetics in Contemporary American Fiction"; Stacey Balkan's "'City of Clowns': The City as a Performative Space in the Prose of Daniel Alarcón, Junot Díaz, and Roberto Bolaño"; Efraín Barradas's "El realismo cómico de Junot Díaz: Notas sobre *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*"; and Ignacio Lopez-Calvo's "A Postmodern Plátano's Trujillo: Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, more Macondo than McOndo."

of fukú, or what the novel's narrator, Yunior, describes as "the curse and Doom of the New World" *(Oscar Wao* 1). He explains, "it is believed that the arrival of Europeans on Hispaniola unleashed the fukú on the world, and we've all been in the shit ever since" *(Oscar Wao* 1). Yunior also links fukú directly to the pernicious legacy of the Trujillato. He claims that Trujillo was fukú's "high priest": "No one knows whether Trujillo was the Curse's servant or its master, its agent or its principal, but it was clear he and it had an understanding, that them two was *tight*" *(Oscar Wao* 2-3, emphasis original). Whatever the case—Trujillo and fukú, or Trujillo *as* fukú—the curse dominates the life of Yunior's college roommate, "nerdboy" Oscar "Wao" de León, who is raised in New Jersey in the decades after Trujillo's death.

As Yunior's description suggests, fukú (sometimes spelled fucú) as it is perceived among Dominicans is decidedly supernatural in nature. Derby, during her research, encountered Dominican respondents who described fukú as a both a superhuman aura that surrounded Trujillo, and as "an evil charge passed through bodily extensions such as clothing, house, touch, or even the uttering of one's name" (217). Yunior's and Derby's descriptions, when taken together, suggest that fukú moves both synchronically and diachronically—through populations and through time. I would suggest that fukú is thus actually a means of codifying distinct traumas (such as the arrival of Columbus, or the Perejil Massacre), as well a means of tracing how those traumas become transgenerational, reverberating through Dominican history and into the diaspora, where they affect individuals chronologically and geographically removed from the original traumatic event, such as Yunior and Oscar.

Although Oscar ultimately loses his life to fukú, Yunior's stated goal is to construct a zafa or "counterspell" *(Oscar Wao* 7) to protect Oscar's surviving family members. This zafa takes the form of a meticulous narrative of Oscar's life, and of the larger de León and Cabral (Oscar's maternal lineage) family histories. Throughout the crafting of Yunior's counterspell, it becomes clear that he hopes it can save not just the de Leóns, but also himself and all other Dominicans living in the aftermath of the Trujillato. If fukú is trauma, Yunior's zafa narrative is a form of witnessing—his attempt to assert the reality of the horrors perpetrated by Trujillo, and the reality of their after-effects, in order to produce a better future for Oscar's family. Indeed, Yunior hopes that Oscar's niece, Isis, will take his narrative, "add her own insights and she'll put an end to it [fukú]" once and for all *(Oscar Wao* 331).

Throughout the novel, Yunior knowingly locates himself within the tradition of metatestimonio, citing both Alvarez and Vargas Llosa in his footnotes.[122] However, *Oscar Wao* as a whole is skeptical of Yunior's stated project. In this final chapter, I argue that, via its invocation of archives, Díaz's novel interrogates the intent and efficacy of metatestimonio—and by extension, questions whether it is possible for diasporic Caribbean subjects to heal from historical traumas like the Trujillato. In order to support this argument, I will first suggest that Yunior's attempted metatestimonio unintentionally

[122] Díaz has been openly disdainful of Vargas Llosa's novel, suggesting that it is reiterating well-traveled territory, and is overly-sympathetic to the dictator: "I mean, have you read *The Feast of the Goat*? Pardon me while I hate [. . . .] Vargas Llosa's take on the Trujillo regime was identical to Crasweller's and Crasweller wrote his biography 40 years ago!" (qtd. in Danticat 93). In *Oscar Wao*, Yunior mentions Alvarez's *Butterflies* in passing as he tells the story of Oscar's mother, Belicia: "It wasn't like *In the Time of the Butterflies*, where a kindly Mirabal Sister steps up and befriends the poor scholarship student" *(Oscar Wao* 83). While indirect, this might be read as a criticism of Alvarez's decision to focus on the more privileged victims of the Trujillato—and perhaps an effort to highlight Alvarez's own class privilege.

re-silences victims by withholding an important archive of testimony from the reader. Second, I will analyze the novel's artwork, arguing that it constitutes a counterarchive exposing the problematic nature of Yunior's archive-zafa. Finally, I conclude that while *Oscar Wao* does not deny the need to address traumatic pasts, it reminds us to be perceptive of the ways that metatestimonio may reiterate the problematic power dynamics it attempts to overthrow.

PÁGINAS EN BLANCO: ABSENT TESTIMONIES

In true metatestimonio fashion, *Oscar Wao* calls attention to who is speaking throughout its narrative—Yunior's voice is distinctive, and he often ruminates on his own role as interlocutor. However, via its frequent invocations of archival materials, the novel also calls attention to who does not, or cannot, speak. Indeed, *Oscar Wao* is at its heart the story of a forcibly absented archive. Readers are constantly told about missing documents and/or gaps in the de León family narrative, which Yunior calls "páginas en blanco" (blank pages). The novel is replete with such páginas, but two in particular fascinate Yunior.

The first is a three hundred-page book Oscar's maternal grandfather, Abelard Cabral, was rumored to have written during the Trujillato. Abelard's "exposé of the supernatural roots of the Trujillo regime" *(Oscar Wao* 245) was allegedly destroyed by the dictatorship—along with all of Abelard's books, papers, and every "single example of his handwriting" *(Oscar Wao* 246)—after he was imprisoned for insulting the dictator. The second is Oscar's final book (also three hundred pages in length) detailing the origins

of the de León family fukú, written in the Dominican Republic during the early 90s presidency of Trujillist Joaquín Balaguer, "one of El Jefe's more efficient ringwraiths" *(Oscar Wao* 90). Like Abelard's exposé, this book disappears, vanishing somewhere on the way from the island to New Jersey after Oscar is murdered by corrupt police officers. Yunior would like to believe that these two books, if found, could provide a solution to the de Léon family's troubles (though the novel's general skepticism about the utility of documentation and testimony suggests that belief is ill-founded). Ultimately, however, he refuses to do anything other than speculate about their existence or contents: "The Lost Final Book of Dr. Abelard Luis Cabral. I'm sure this is nothing more than a figment of our Island's hypertrophied voodoo imagination. And nothing less" *(Oscar Wao* 246). The "nothing more" in this statement suggests a dismissal of Abelard's manuscript, but the "nothing less" counters with an awareness that the book's disappearance is significant, and that its absence must therefore be recorded. Yunior thus settles for treating such páginas en blanco as irrecoverable parts of the past.

Scholarly perception of the páginas and Yunior's treatment of them has tended to fall into two distinct camps. The first suggests that the páginas are generative—a means of acknowledging and honoring permanently silenced experiences, challenging official histories, and enacting healing. For example, Pamela J. Rader writes that, "The *página en blanco* reminds us of all we do not know and marks the unwritten potential of the human imagination. Díaz's blank pages and the novel as a whole become counter narratives, which resist the imposed, monolithic narratives manufactured by dictators and their tools" (1-2). Likewise, Monica Hanna has suggested that the páginas "become construed

as a freedom that allows Yunior to fill in the gaps in a more creative way" (500), forcing him to write a history that allows for multiple versions of events. I sympathize with the politics of these scholars, and understand the necessity of Yunior's approach to the historical ruptures created by the Trujillato. Ignoring the existence of such silences would be doing violence to Trujillo's victims once again. Attempting to fill them in definitively would result in yet another "official" history that excludes differing perspectives.

However, the origins of the term "pagína en blanco" give me pause. Yunior admits that it is inspired by the "Demon Balaguer," who inserted a blank page into his memoirs as a means of denying involvement in the death of a journalist: "he claimed he knew who had done the foul deed (not him, of course), and left a blank page, a página en blanco, in the text to be filled in with the truth upon his death [. . .] Balaguer died in 2002. The página is still blanca" *(Oscar Wao* 90). Yunior's use of a term inspired by a Trujillist, though apparently meant to be sardonic, is also deeply troubling, suggesting that even as he attempts to re-define the Trujillato's history for Dominicans, he cannot escape the regime's own discursive tactics. Taken to its conclusion, these páginas suggest a link between Yunior's rhetorical strategies and those utilized by the regime to control public discourse and official narratives.

Members of the second aforementioned scholarly camp seem to share my concerns, emphasizing that while the páginas en blanco might at times be generative, they are *also* symptomatic of Yunior's tendency to silence or manipulate information that contradicts the story he wants to tell—a tendency he shares with the dictatorship. Elena Machado Saéz, for example, has suggested convincingly that Yunior withholds evidence

of Oscar's and his own queerness in order to maintain the appearance of traditional Dominican machismo. She claims that Yunior's "investment in telling Oscar's story is motivated by an inability to tell the full story about himself" (524). T.S. Miller, on the other hand, is suspicious of Yunior's tendency to "narrate events in which he took no part" (99) and of which he could conceivably have no knowledge—though, to be fair, Yunior often admits when he is speculating or inventing material about events he did not witness.

While both arguments are thought provoking, I feel the need to treat Yunior's narrative with suspicion for a different reason: a second missing archive haunts the novel, which Trujillo had no hand in creating. This second collection of páginas en blanco is comprised of the documents Yunior himself amasses in order to construct his zafa, including Oscar's comic books, the de León family's photographs, Lola's letters, Oscar's voluminous writings, and the oral testimonies of Oscar's female relatives. I base this assertion on an unusual characteristic of Yunior's footnotes: the presence of quotation marks to denote excerpts from historical sources. Quotation marks are not characteristic in Díaz's fiction—none of the short stories in *Drown* (1996) or *This is How You Lose Her* (2012) utilize them to designate dialogue. In interviews, Díaz has commented that this stylistic choice is meant to reflect the slipperiness of memory: "It's not just Ah this motherfucker doesn't use quotes, but the way that memory works in my stories has everything to do with why there could easily be confusion between the spoken word and the imagined word" (qtd. in Lewis). I would extrapolate from this to suggest that the lack of quotation marks acknowledges the fact that the first person narrators of Díaz's

stories—often Yunior—are telling the *entire* story, drawing the dialogue of other characters largely from memory.

The primary text of *Oscar Wao* follows stylistic suit. Yet the presence of quoted material in the footnotes suggests that when Yunior wants to add authority or veracity to his narrative, he doesn't rely on memory—he excerpts sources verbatim, thus making space for other voices in his narrative. Tellingly, however, he never offers direct quotations from Oscar's writings, or from the oral testimonies he's gathered from Oscar's family members. Yunior seems to trust his memory of these materials unfailingly, choosing to mediate all of their testimony, thereby (consciously or not) privileging his own voice over those of the de Léons. Díaz has suggested, and rightly so, that victims often simply *cannot* tell their own stories: "it's rarely the people who've been devoured by a story that get to bear witness to its ravages. Usually the survivors, the storytellers, are other people, not even family" (qtd. in O'Rourke). However, the novel is populated with other survivors—survivors who also happen to be Oscar's family: La Inca, Belicia, and Lola—a fact that renders Yunior's univocal telling of events problematic.

Yunior's muting of these other voices is in contradiction to how he attempts to position himself in the narrative. Throughout the novel, he calls himself "your humble Watcher" *(Oscar Wao* 4), in reference to the character from Stan Lee and Jack Kirby's *Fantastic Four* (1961) comics. This being is a sort of extraterrestrial amanuensis, tasked to observe and record events on Earth without interfering in them. Like Benjamin's Angel of History, who despite its wishes cannot "awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed" (257), the Watcher can only observe the wreckage of Earth's history

piling up at its feet. It stands passive and "silent as history unfolds" before it (Marvel Entertainment). When translated into the terminology of testimonio, this image of the detached observer is similar to what John Beverly calls a "compiler" or "activator" (35), and what Dori Laub calls a "listener" (58): an outsider who facilitates victims' testimony, collects it, and records it. Yunior definitely exhibits the desire to gather testimony. However, he fails, as Laub puts it, "to be a witness to himself" (58), to be wary of how his own motives and desires might alter his memory of the de Leóns' testimony.

Figure 6: *Uatu the Watcher* (1992). ©Marvel Entertainment Co.

Indeed, I would argue that one of the most significant aspects of *Oscar Wao* is that it makes clear that Yunior *is himself* a witness to the Trujillato. Whereas theories of

trauma have typically limited the appellation of witness to those with direct experience of violence, Díaz suggests that when trauma is transgenerational and transnational, so, too, is witnessing. Thus, Dominican Americans such as Yunior, Oscar, and Lola, who are a generation removed from the ravages of the Trujillato, should be considered witnesses to that regime's cruelty. While Yunior is ostensibly marginal to the events of the novel, he gets pulled into history much like the Watcher, who is compelled to warn the Fantastic Four about the planet-devouring entity Galactus. His need to come to terms with the Dominican past and his own identity—to perform his own "face work"—along with his well-intentioned desire to create a zafa, mean that he is no longer merely recording. He is, in his own way, *testifying*. While this in itself is not problematic, Yunior's failure to be a witness to himself means that the zafa he constructs is not just for the sake of the de Leons'—it is also for himself. As a result, he creates páginas en blanco without realizing or acknowledging that he does so.

This is most obvious in the case of Oscar, who left behind a large body of writing. Readers know that Yunior has these materials, as he tells us that he keeps them in "four refrigerators" in his basement *(Oscar Wao* 330). However, as T.S. Miller notes, Yunior never offers excerpts from these documents (99). Unlike, say, the narrator of Alvarez's *Butterflies*, who provides readers fictionalized portions of the Mirabal sisters' correspondence and diaries, Oscar's writing is never produced so that the reader can peruse it without Yunior's assistance. This omission is clearest in the final section of the novel, about Oscar's last letter home before his death. The letter reveals that Oscar consummated his love with the prostitute Ybón, and ends with the optimistic refrain,

"The beauty! The beauty!" *(Oscar Wao* 335). Yunior's description of the letter uses attributive phrases that suggest we are getting Oscar's words—he notes that Oscar "reported," "observed," and "wrote" *(Oscar Wao* 334-35).

However, after all of these attributions, it is always Yunior's voice that we hear, referring to Oscar in the third person: "He wrote that he couldn't believe he'd had to wait for this so goddamn long" *(Oscar Wao* 334-35). All of these interjections thus amount to a kind of ventriloquism on Yunior's part. Oscar's voice never emerges in the first person, and is instead obscured in favor of Yunior's paraphrasing—or perhaps outright fabrication, as Machado Saéz and Miller suggest. I think, however, that Yunior's subterfuge is driven not by malice or insecurity, but by his need to remember Oscar's brutal and senseless death as meaningful. As Ramón Saldívar pointedly queries, "What kind of 'beauty' is it that Oscar claims to have discovered in the final days of his life that might counter the horror of his murder?" (593).[123] Clearly, for Yunior, if Oscar dies bravely in the name of romantic love, he becomes a symbol of resistance to the political terror and violent legacy of the Trujillato: a sacrificial zafa for the fukú plaguing the Dominican people. In refusing to consult Oscar's written text, Yunior is free to remember it as he wishes—thus allowing him to maintain hope for his zafa.

The possibility that Yunior occludes Oscar's testimony, even if he does so without ill intentions, is troubling—despite the fact that Oscar has been "devoured" by the story, as Díaz puts it. I am even more troubled by the possibility that Yunior's voice

[123] This refrain has also been viewed with skepticism by Richard Patteson: "The faint, ironic echo of Kurtz's last words from *Heart of Darkness* only underscores the horror, the horror of the price Oscar pays for that moment of bliss" (13).

overrides those of the surviving de León and Cabral women: Oscar's adoptive grandmother La Inca, his mother Belicia, and his sister Lola. There are strong suggestions throughout the novel that Yunior has collected their oral testimonies. When he recounts Belicia's refusal to flee the Dominican Republic after she is brutalized by Trujillo's henchmen, he writes: "I wish I could say different but I've got it right here on tape" *(Oscar Wao* 160).[124] Yet despite the existence of such recordings, readers are given little direct access to these women's voices. La Inca, for example, with her status as matriarch and her extensive knowledge of family lore, gets only a small sub-section near the end of the novel entitled "La Inca Speaks." This section is three sentences long, and like the rest of the novel's primary text, is not demarcated by quotation marks. While it is possible that we are hearing directly from La Inca, it seems equally possible that Yunior is once again mediating for the reader. Significantly, La Inca's "speech" serves to contradict Oscar's version of events, *not* Yunior's: "He didn't meet her [Ybón] in the street like he told you" *(Oscar Wao* 289). If this is indeed La Inca speaking, then we must ask ourselves why Yunior gives her so little space—allowing her testimony merely to supplement the reader's knowledge about Oscar's recent past, rather than to flesh out the family's larger history.

Oscar's mother Belicia fares even worse. Her story is central to the de León family curse, and she is the family's only direct victim of the Trujillato's physical violence. Yunior tells us that "at the end of her life, when she was being eaten alive by

[124] Oscar also apparently made recordings, as readers are given a brief excerpt of Ybón speaking, "AS RECORDED BY OSCAR" *(Oscar Wao* 289).

cancer, Beli *would talk* about how trapped they all felt" under the dictatorship *(Oscar Wao* 81, emphasis added). She thus clearly offers oral testimony, even if it is much delayed and brief. Yet Belicia does not get even La Inca's tiny section of the novel in which to speak to the reader. As is the case with Oscar, Yunior invariably writes about her in the third person rather than giving us access to her voice. Her testimony is filtered entirely through Yunior's point of view, subsumed into his fukú narrative rather than telling her own story on her own terms—which, as a victim, she so very clearly needs to do.

Lola seems to be an exception to Yunior's tendency to mediate, speaking to the reader in two large sections of the novel. This is a significant development in Díaz's typically male-centric writing that has earned the praise of reviewers and piqued the interest of scholars.[125] To be sure, the same possibility that haunted La Inca's testimony haunts this one—is this Lola speaking directly to us, or Yunior mediating? I think that it's the former, largely because she directly contradicts Yunior's belief in fukú and zafa: "I don't think there are any such things as curses. I think there is only life. That's enough" *(Oscar Wao* 205). Yet though he gives Lola space to speak, he cannot resist adding his own take on her testimony. Her first interjection is prefaced by approximately three pages of italicized text—the only such section in the novel—referring to her in the second person. Given Yunior's previous romantic relationship with Lola, and this text's

[125] Interestingly, however, Díaz has stated that it was not his idea to allow Lola to speak: "Actually, my ex-fiancee's mentor told me that I should have a chapter about Lola. And in some ways she saved the book, the book was literally falling apart when this law professor suggested it. If it hadn't been for my ex-fiancee, and her law professor, the book would not have held together" (qtd. in Moreno 540). That Lola's portions of the novel were the influence of outsiders may explain why Yunior's voice—so dominant in *Drown* (1996)—once again becomes primary in Díaz's most recent collection, *This is How You Lose Her* (2013).

extensive focus on her body, it seems apparent that this is his voice. Significantly, the italicized text begins with a summing up of Lola's life: "*This is how it all starts: with your mother calling you into the bathroom" (Oscar Wao* 51). In ascribing a seemingly mystical starting point for Lola's narrative, Yunior attempts—with mixed results—to shoehorn her story into the narrative he wants to create about fukú and zafa, despite her stated disbelief in the phenomena. And in describing her to readers for three pages before she speaks, he attempts to influence their first impressions of her. While Yunior thus does not mediate her testimony to the same extent as the other members of the de Léon family, he does feel the need to qualify her contribution before including it in his narrative—thus refusing to allow it to speak by itself.

I can only speculate about how much of Yunior's story Lola would corroborate, just as I can only speculate about the content of the other páginas en blanco that constitute Yunior's withheld archive. What I can say with certainty is that the existence of these páginas demand that the reader acknowledge Yunior's own status and motives as a witness. Díaz has suggested repeatedly that although Yunior is focused on Trujillo, "The real dictatorship is the book itself, in its telling" (qtd. in O'Rourke). Although I am hesitant to privilege authorial intention, I find Díaz's statement helpful for thinking about what the novel has to say about metatestimonio. Like many writers of testimonial and dictator novels, Yunior has the best possible intentions. He carefully acknowledges the indeterminate nature of history, as well as the silences he simply cannot fill. He admits the possibility that his zafa might not work, stating his fear that, as Dr. Manhattan warns in Alan Moore's *Watchmen,* "'Nothing ever ends'" *(Oscar Wao* 331). Yet he still dreams

that it will be *his* book that puts an end to fukú. Like Alvarez, who in her postscript to *Butterflies* contends that the Trujillato is "an epoch in the life of the Dominican Republic that [. . .] can only be understood by fiction, only finally be redeemed by the imagination" (324), Yunior wants to believe in the power of a single, well-told story to provide healing to Dominicans at large. As a result, all narratives—even those of still-living survivors—are forced through Yunior's zafa-tinted glasses. *Oscar Wao* thus offers a poignant warning: metatestimonial fiction perhaps better serves the psychic needs of its author than those of the victims whose story it ostensibly tells.

THE MARVEL UNIVERSE AND VISUAL COUNTERARCHIVES

While the novel thus provides important commentary on the literary practice of metatestimonio, I think that it also troubles the concept of zafa—which I see as akin to theories of "working through" in trauma studies. This becomes most apparent when we consider the artwork from the original 2007 Riverhead Books edition of *Oscar Wao*. Along with the cover art (see Fig. 12), this edition is punctuated by a frontispiece and three plates: a rocket ship or missile (see Fig. 7), a diagram of an atom (see Fig. 8), a clenched fist (see Fig. 10), and a biohazard symbol (see Fig. 14), respectively. According to Stephanie Huntwork, who designed this edition of *Oscar Wao*, the frontispiece and plates were not part of the original book design—they were "added later at the request of the author." Díaz's deliberate selection of the novel's artwork, along with *Oscar Wao*'s investment in comic book culture, suggests that these images should be read as part of the narrative. In fact, I contend that they recall Oscar's stash of comic books, stored in

Yunior's refrigerators. As such, these images can be read as constituting a counterarchive through which Oscar posthumously "speaks back" to Yunior, undercutting his zafa and criticizing his role as narrator.

I developed this theory after reading the frontispiece and first two plates in tandem with the novel's epigraphs. Famously, the first epigraph is from a 1966 issue of Marvel's *Fantastic Four* series: "Of what import are brief, nameless lives . . . to Galactus?" This quotation has typically been read as a commentary on both Trujillo's disregard for human life, and on the importance of sub-altern histories—those "brief, nameless lives" that Yunior seeks to illuminate (Hanna 499). I agree with such assessments, but I think it is also important to read the epigraph along with the frontispiece and first plate: the rocket ship/missile and the atom.

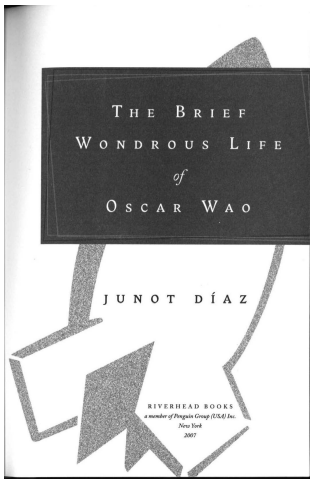

Figure 7: Frontispiece, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007). ©Riverhead Books.

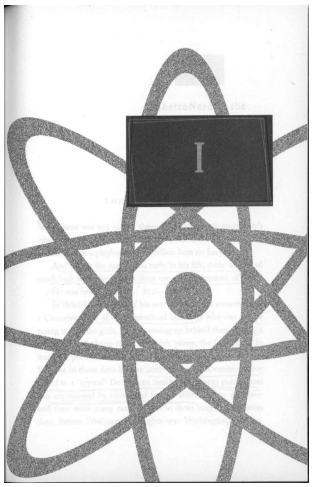

Figure 8: Plate 1, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007). © Riverhead Books.

Díaz has provocatively labeled the island of Hispaniola "the Ground Zero of the New World" (*Oscar Wao* 1); the rocket/missile and atom are thus fitting evocations of invasion, nuclear catastrophe, violence, and terror. However, Díaz has also commented frequently on how well suited science fiction is for thinking about the experience of immigration. In one of his footnotes, Yunior speculates about Oscar's love of the genre, saying that, "It may have been a consequence of being Antillean (who more sci-fi than us?), or of living in the DR for the first couple years of his life and then abruptly wrenchingly relocating to New Jersey—a single green card shifting not only worlds (from Third to First) but centuries (from almost no TV or electricity to plenty of both)" *(Oscar Wao* 22-23). The rocket ship, offering the possibility of a journey, and the atom, with its potential for transformation and energy, thus become apt analogies for

immigration and diaspora.

However, when paired with the epigraph from the *Fantastic Four*, these two images also become legible as references to that particular comic book's narrative arc, reflecting the *Fantastic Four*'s origin mythos. For the unfamiliar, scientist Rex Reed and crew test an experimental spaceship and are bombarded by "an unknown form of cosmic radiation," thus gaining their superpowers (Dougall 100). Significantly, these superpowers are drastic physical mutations that render the Fantastic Four both exceptional and grotesque—marking them as visibly different from the rest of society.

Figure 9: *Fantastic Four Origins* (1992). © Marvel Entertainment Co.

The correlations between the Fantastic Four's narrative and Oscar's own experiences of unbelonging are obvious, as a sense of physical and mental otherness characterizes his entire life. He is a dark-complected, bad-haired, "overweight freak" *(Oscar Wao* 15), a nerdboy who "couldn't have passed for Normal if he'd wanted to" *(Oscar Wao* 21)—in the U.S. *or* in the Dominican Republic. Furthermore, the Fantastic

Four's genetic mutations recall remarks that Díaz has made about the history of race in the Caribbean being a history of genetic engineering, or as he termed it, "the breeding of people" (Blanton). The frontispiece and the first plate thus suggest not only the sense of alienation, difference, and racialization that mark Oscar's lived experience of diaspora—it also recalls the conditions that produced his existence as an Afro-Latino subject in the New World.

Likewise, the third epigraph and the plate that accompanies it illuminate each other and Yunior's narrative in significant ways. The epigraph is drawn from a Trujillo-era issue of the Dominican newspaper *La Nación*, and declares that, "Trujillo is not a man. He is . . . a cosmic force" *(Oscar Wao* 204). Such language was typical of the way that Trujillo portrayed himself to the Dominican public. As Derby notes, "The locus of the leader's charisma [. . .] resided not in his body but in his alter-corpus, his body double or 'superbody,' a magical being who enabled Trujillo *to extend his person into this world and others*" (207, emphasis added).[126] The image of the clenched fist that directly precedes the epigraph would thus seem to be a reference to the dictator's superhuman grip on the nation.

[126] Derby explains that, like Papa Doc Duvalier in neighboring Haiti, Trujillo encouraged the public to consider him a supernatural being. However, whereas Duvalier sought to embody the Haitian lwa in his person, Trujillo allegedly used a separate being known as a muchachito—a guardian angel or homunculus who "was blessed with the powers of divination" (Derby 211), and came to the dictator in his sleep to warn him of enemy plots.

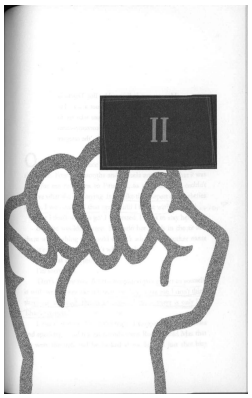

Figure 10: Plate 2, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007). ©Riverhead Books.

Yet "cosmic force" is also remarkably similar to Marvel's description of Galactus—one of the *Fantastic Four*'s most fearsome enemies—as a "cosmic entity." Galactus is a giant being, often depicted with one clenched fist and one grasping hand, that devours planets, "destroying whole peoples and consuming entire worlds, for his hunger is insatiable" (Dougall 106). If Galactus is world destroying, then the pairing of this epigraph and image implies that Trujillo is *likewise* world destroying. I would argue that, as Belicia's experiences of torture make clear, the Trujillato is world-destroying in the sense that Elaine Scarry has described so hauntingly in *The Body in Pain*: "intense pain [. . .] destroys a person's self and world, a destruction experienced spatially as either the contraction of the universe down to the immediate vicinity of the body or as the body swelling to fill the entire universe " (35). Troublingly, although Galactus is prevented from devouring the Earth, he is never truly defeated by the Fantastic Four. This suggests that while Yunior's narrative might momentarily ease the destruction wrought by the

Figure 11: *The Coming of Galactus* (1992). ©Marvel Entertainment Co.

Trujillato, the regime's threat to the Dominican people will linger well into the future.

While the image of the clenched fist thus hints at the possible failure of Yunior's zafa, the two remaining images—which are not obviously related to the *Fantastic Four* or accompanied by epigraphs—offer a more direct critique of Yunior's project and the concept of zafa. The cover art of *Oscar Wao*, designed by graphic artist Rodrigo Corral, is startling.[127] Oscar is profiled in deep crimson silhouette. The image's lines are spattered and runny, evoking graffiti or blood. Coming out of Oscar's head, we see the shape of a wing.

[127] Corral has also designed covers for Díaz's short story collections *Drown* (1996) and *This is How You Lose Her* (2012) (*rodrigocorral.com*).

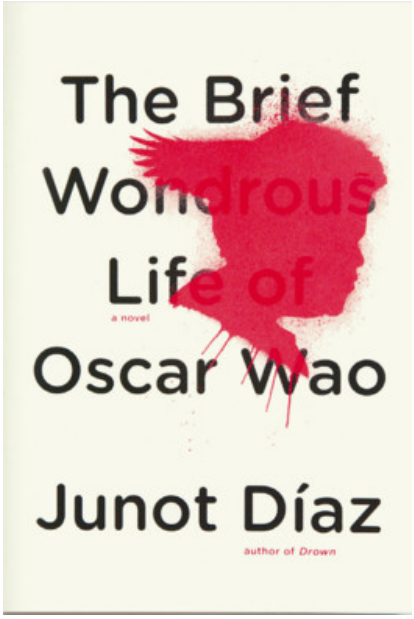

Figure 12: Cover art for *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007). ©Rodrigo Corral.

This wing mimics the trajectory of the bullet that ultimately kills Oscar. It also suggests the winged helmet of Mercury—the Roman god of travelers and messengers, a trickster figure that guided souls to the land of the dead. Such an association is fitting for Oscar given his status as transnational diasporic subject, his voluminous writings, and his efforts to unearth long-buried family secrets. Likewise, it could reference Icarus's wax wings, foreshadowing Oscar's romantic over-reachings and untimely demise. However, Corral's commentary on the image indicates that, like the frontispiece and plates, it can also be read as a reference to comic books. He states that while the cover art was influenced by Díaz's physical descriptions of Oscar, it was also inspired by Oscar's "*obsessions with comic books*, and incredible imagination" ("Brief and Wondrous," emphasis added). I contend that this image might also invoke the Marvel superhero Thor,

created by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby in 1962. Aside from his mythical hammer Mjolnir, Thor's trademark is his winged helmet.

Figure 13: *Thor* (1992). ©Marvel Entertainment Co.

Thor is a significant character to associate with Oscar for a number of reasons. Thor is famous for loving a woman he cannot be with: Jane Foster, who ultimately marries a mortal man. The image thus might indicate, as Machado Saéz argues, that Oscar's final letter about Ybón is Yunior's fabrication—or that, had Oscar survived, their affair would have been short-lived. However, I think the image has a more important link to Yunior's narrative. Like his Norse namesake, Marvel's Thor is bound by the prophecy of Ragnarök, the infinite cycle of destruction and remaking that governs the world. He is thus doomed to fight the same battles over and over again throughout eternity. In the Marvel series, Thor becomes cognizant of the cyclical nature of Ragnarök, and vows to

put an end to it. However, that ending is ambiguous:

> Unwilling to endure his people's dishonor through yet another meaningless cycle, Thor severed the tapestry that wove the reality of Asgard's dimension, wiping himself and all of Asgard from existence.
>
> Will Thor return? In the past, Ragnarok had been a self-perpetuating cycle, and the circumstances of Asgard's return *could spring from the same processes that restored it in the past*. But these thoughts are idle speculation. *For now*, Thor sleeps the sleep of the gods. (Dougall 303, emphases added)

This implies that if Yunior achieves a zafa with Oscar's story, it is perhaps only temporary. Fukú will have to be re-conquered by the Dominican people again and again. This is in keeping with the thought of trauma theorists such as Neil Smelser, who suggest that working through cultural trauma should be conceived of as a "constant, recurrent struggle" (42) rather than a finite process that can be completed by a single individual. In other words, the image verifies that, as Yunior fears, "nothing ever ends."[128] Worse yet, the image hints at the possibility that this recurrent working through is, like Ragnarök, "meaningless"—that the Dominican people's destiny is overdetermined by fukú and the Trujillato, and is thus unalterable.

While Thor is a well-known character, thanks in large part to Marvel's 2011 and 2013 film adaptations of his story, it was a bit more vexing to locate the biohazard symbol in Oscar's comic book archive. Its obvious association with pathology and contagion suggests that fukú is both endemic among Dominicans and transmissible—an assertion that Derby's description of the phenomenon as an "evil charge passed through

[128] This emphasis on the cyclical nature of working through is perhaps also hinted at in the name of Oscar's niece, Isis, who Yunior hopes will put an end to fukú. In Egyptian mythology, Isis was wife to Osiris and mother of Horus. She resurrects Osiris after he is murdered by his brother, then is impregnated and gives birth to her son. She is thus linked to birth, death, and rebirth—the most basic cycle in human existence.

bodily extensions" supports, and with which Yunior would likely agree. However,

Figure 14: Plate 3, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007). ©Riverhead Books.

the presence of a biohazard sign also serves as a warning, indicating that a pathogen has been contained—but that it remains deadly if that containment is breached. The placement of the symbol at the end of the novel might thus mean that Yunior has similarly contained fukú so that its threat to the general populace is reduced. However, I think there are intriguing possibilities afforded by reading the plate as reference to a somewhat obscure villain in the Marvel universe—called, simply, Biohazard.

Biohazard is featured in the *Deathlok* comic book series, created in 1974 by Rich Buckler and Doug Moench, then revised by Dwayne McDuffie in 1990. Deathlok is a military cyborg with a human brain that has been taken from a cadaver, which is not so far removed from Yunior's efforts to "reanimate" Oscar for purposes of his zafa.[129]

[129] In McDuffie's revised version of the series, Deathlok's brain comes from Michael Collins, an African American scientist and pacifist. This version of *Deathlok* is concerned with themes similar to those explored in *Oscar Wao*: Afro-diasporic identity, double consciousness, racial oppression, and political

Figure 15: Cover art for "At Deathlok's Door," part three of "The Biohazard Agenda," by Mike Manley (1992). ©Marvel Entertainment Co.

violence. These connections are tenuous, but provocative. For a more extensive discussion of McDuffie's work, see Lysa Rivera's "Diasporic Identities in Dwayne McDuffie's *Deathlok* Comic Book Series."

Biohazard originates when Deathlok's first human brain, drawn from a soldier named John Kelly, is damaged and discarded. The brain mutates, becoming a monstrous creature that devours others in order to gain their memories. Biohazard becomes obsessed with regaining its lost identity, seeking to "write over its damaged set of memories with a *good* copy" ("Deathlok's Door," emphasis original). Eventually, it attempts to consume Kelly's surviving family members, declaring that, "We will be together again" ("Till Deathlok"), but it is defeated by Deathlok before it can carry out its intentions.

This sci-fi tale of reanimation is a well-suited analogue for Yunior's fukú-zafa narrative, recalling both Trujillo's own alleged supernatural powers, and fukú's tendency to "rise from the dead" to overtake Dominicans. The image also appears to serve as important commentary on Yunior's narrative practices. It can be read as Oscar's warning to Yunior from beyond the grave, a threat to return and consume Yunior psychologically. Indeed, Yunior's recurring nightmares about Oscar years after the latter's death would seem to support such an interpretation: "He's standing in one of the passages, all mysterious-like, wearing a wrathful mask that hides his face but behind the eyeholes I see a familiar pair of close-set eyes [. . . .] [s]ometimes, though, I look up at him and he has no face and I wake up screaming" *(Oscar Wao* 325). However, I think the novel implies that *Yunior* is also akin to Biohazard. As I noted earlier, Yunior does in a sense "consume" others, appropriating their voices in order "write over" memories damaged by trauma and silence. Likewise, Yunior's fascination with the de León family is in many ways an effort to incorporate their story into his own—driven by his desire to understand his own identity as a Dominican American man, and to maintain a connection with ex-

girlfriend Lola. The biohazard image, then, is a critique of Yunior and his zafa narrative, depicting it as exploitative and self-serving.

Ultimately these images, recalling Oscar's comic books stashed in Yunior's basement, support what I have suggested elsewhere in this dissertation: archives open themselves up to their own critique. Without Yunior's voice to mediate it, the artwork offers up a much harsher version of the novel's larger criticisms of metatestimonio as a literary genre. Whereas Yunior maintains hope that his zafa will work, that Oscar's niece Isis will "take all we've done and all we've learned and add her own insights and she'll put an end to [fukú]" (*Oscar Wao* 331), the novel's visual archive attests to the improbability (if not the impossibility) of such an ending. Indeed, it seems to confirm what Trenton Hickman suggests: "trauma created by the trujillato 'believes in' members of the Diasporic Dominican community because it lives in and through them, surging up at unexpected moments" ("Trujillato" 167). *Oscar Wao* thus implies that even if metatestimonial fiction might function as an author's "very own counterspell" (7), for the people of the Dominican Republic and its diasporas, dealing with the after-effects of the Trujillato is a never-ending process.

CONCLUSION

The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao does important work in claiming that Dominican Americans born after the assassination of Trujillo should be considered witnesses to that regime's abuses. Pressured by the complex ways that histories of violence reverberate into the present, trauma studies has of necessity developed

frameworks—including transgenerational trauma and postmemory—to account for the fact that individuals can be harmed by events from which they are chronologically and geographically removed. Theories of testimony, however, still tend to reserve the appellation of "witness" for those who have direct lived experience of political terror. The plights of Yunior, Lola, and Oscar, I argue, demonstrate the urgency of re-thinking the category of witness in both transgenerational and *transnational* terms. As Yunior makes clear, fukú has migrated along with the Dominican people, meaning that those living in diaspora are all witnesses to the ongoing after-effects of the Trujillato.

However, in deploying the archival impulse to critique metatestimonial fiction and zafa narratives, the novel questions whether justice or healing is possible for these diasporic witnesses. Segura-Rico asserts that the purpose of metatestimonial fiction as a genre "is to recover a historical memory that will not silence the voices of the victims and that will have political and legal implications" (176). Yunior clearly wants to help build this kind of historical memory, to make visible those "brief, nameless lives" damaged by the Trujillato and to put fukú to rest. Yet, in privileging his own voice, and in generating páginas en blanco, Yunior's narrative demonstrates what Caren Irr calls the "dictatorial tendencies in narration" (15), i.e., that metatestimonio can very easily replicate the discursive practices of the regime it seeks to criticize. Chillingly, the novel thus implies that it is not only the trauma of the Trujillato that "lives in and through" Dominicans. The regime's epistemological violences do, too—suggesting that the distinction between zafa and fukú is blurred.

Like Dionne Brand, whose work I discussed in my previous chapter, Díaz thus

deploys the archival impulse not in the service of healing, but to express his skepticism about efforts to redeem the Caribbean's traumatic histories. In refusing to confirm the success of Yunior's zafa, in demonstrating that some páginas always remain blank, he suggest that Dominican subjects are bound to re-work the traumas of the Trujillato again and again. Saldívar argues that, ultimately, Díaz seeks "a way to coexist with the chaos" of the New World, "not because one finds peace in chaos but because in the context of the brutal histories of conquest, colonization, exploitation, and oppression in the Americas it is less duplicitous to stake an ending on chaos than on the teleologies of emergence, realism, or romance" (592). Taken together, Brand's and Díaz's works suggest that such "coexistence" demands the recognition that daily life in the New World is overdetermined by the hemisphere's violent past, and that for Caribbean diasporic subjects, "nothing ever ends."

Conclusion: Making Life with the Archive

> "Break a vase, and the love that reassembles the fragments is stronger than that love which took its symmetry for granted when it was whole. The glue that fits the pieces together is the sealing of its original shape [. . . .] [t]his gathering of broken pieces is the care and pain of the Antilles, and if the pieces are disparate, ill-fitting, they contain more pain than their original sculpture, those icons and sacred vessels taken for granted in their ancestral places." --Derek Walcott, "The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory"

The spring of 2010 was a difficult one for the Caribbean and for Caribbeanists, a fact reflected in the general mood at that April's conference of the Association of Caribbean Women Writers and Scholars (ACWWS).[130] Attendees from the University of Puerto Rico spoke anxiously about the future of their institution, which faced immanent funding cuts, tuition hikes, and possible privatization—all major blows for an island population with a forty-five percent poverty rate and only one public university system. An acquaintance from the Río Piedras campus in San Juan was particularly grim, as she sensed what was to come: months of student and faculty strikes, police brutality, and layoffs. The continuing stream of disaster coverage from Haiti (the U.S. news media was still interested in Haiti, then), devastated only four months earlier by the massive Léogâne earthquake, also weighed heavily on everyone's minds. Out of respect, ACWWS dedicated the conference to those who perished in the quake, facilitating memorial readings and discussions of post-earthquake initiatives for housing, women's rights, and the preservation of Haitian libraries. The conference itself was punctuated by yet another disaster whose potential environmental impact on the Caribbean is still

[130] The conference was held at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge. I presented a very early version of what became the first chapter of this study.

unknown four years later—the April 20th explosion of the Deepwater Horizon oilrig in the Gulf of Mexico. Overwhelmed by so much destruction and loss at once, it was a struggle to feel optimistic about the future.

I've faced that struggle many times in the years that have intervened between that conference and the completion of this dissertation. The aporia suggested by the two threads of *"To retrieve what was left"*—that the archival impulse expresses a desire for healing narratives, but that it also cautions that such narratives are politically and emotionally problematic—has prompted me to consider what the impulse might indicate for the future of the Caribbean and its diasporas. Despite my suspicion of premature, overly simplified forms of working through trauma, I recognize in myself what Saidiya Hartman describes as an "insatiable desir[e] for curatives, healing" ("Time of Slavery" 774). I know that history cannot be un-done, yet I would very much like to believe it's possible to ease present sufferings. Despite the truth in Junot Díaz's description of the Caribbean as "always already . . . a post-apocalyptic space," I would like to imagine a future that is not overdetermined by histories of imperialist and racist violence (Blanton). And despite the seeming impossibility of reconciling these contradictions, I believe what Derek Walcott claims in his 1992 Nobel lecture: that the reality of the Antilles is "the reality of light, work, survival" ("The Antilles"). It is in the name of light, work, and survival that I turn in this conclusion to another event that marked the ACWWS conference four years ago—one that I have found myself recalling again and again during my writing.

The first keynote address of that gathering, delivered by Jamaican poet Lorna

Goodison, dealt with the subject of "making life." The phrase is a Jamaican expression connoting the capacity of a people to create something of their circumstances, whether out of necessity, lack, or both. Goodison elaborates on the practice of making life in a poem of the same name:

> We see our sojournings as "making life."
> So after world wars when they wanted
>
> souls to bury dead and raise near-dead,
> they called us in as duppy conquerors.
>
> But when the job was done, they then
> tried to exorcise our task force,
>
> but we remained, took their brickbats
> and became Blackbrits and Jamericans [. . .]
>
> I'm from island in the sun, I had to come
> and my sweetheart poetry joined me.
>
> Not really exiled you see; just making life. (71)

Goodison's poem suggests that part of making life is acknowledging histories of trauma, such as the "brickbats" of racist and xenophobic violence that diasporic subjects have always faced. Likewise, in noting that (neo)colonial metropoles have attempted to "exorcise" Caribbean migrants, she gestures to diasporic subjects' status as embodied reminders of imperialist violence—conjuring up the ghosts of shameful histories that the U.S., Canada, and Europe would like to forget.

Yet the poem also illustrates that making life is the practice of turning hostile, traumatizing environments into livable ones, of surviving despite the threat of destruction. Goodison's conversion of "brickbats" into "Blackbrits and Jamericans"

suggests that making life can be transformative, playful, and defiant. Its link to post-World War migrations, when Caribbean immigrants were summoned to supply a much needed workforce and to help with efforts to re-build Europe (tasks that Goodison labels "duppy conquering"), also suggests that making life calls for purposeful labor and creativity. Perhaps most importantly, in labeling diaspora making life rather than exile, Goodison's poem refuses to equate migration with loss or severance from the homeland. Instead, she counts it as one of many long-standing practices of survival among Caribbean subjects.

During the course of her keynote, Goodison expanded upon the ideas articulated in her poem, suggesting that making life in and through diaspora is a practice that has been sustained and refined by generations of Caribbean women. She ended by describing some of the modes of self-care that she counted among her own iteration of making life, and invited audience members to share theirs. Woman after woman stood, each relating her experiences of making life in diaspora, of carrying on with the business of the everyday, of *surviving*. It was a powerful moment—a collective showing of defiance and determination in the face of so much recent tragedy.

In reflecting on that moment as I arrive at the end of the dissertation process, it occurs to me that I have perhaps been asking the wrong questions throughout this study. I began *"To retrieve what was left"* interested in what these texts had to say about the possibility of redressing the Caribbean's traumatic histories. Now, I ask myself how these novelists' deployment of the archival impulse might help Caribbean diasporic subjects to *survive* the lingering effects of such histories. This question makes it possible to

reconsider the differing manifestations of the impulse that I've traced in the preceding chapters, removing them from oppositional frameworks. Accordingly, I want to use the remainder of this conclusion to posit—briefly—that the works examined in this study are distinct manifestations of the same practice: that of making life with the archive.

Such an assertion may seem counterintuitive given the archive's long-standing scholarly association with death. Critics such as Roberto González Echevarría, Saidiya Hartman, and Carolyn Steedman (to name only a very few) have all made this connection.[131] However, I find Achille Mbembe's work useful for thinking about how a structure so thoroughly linked with death might be used to make life. In "The Power of Archive and Its Limits" (2002), Mbembe posits the following:

> Archiving is a kind of internment, laying something in a coffin, if not to rest, then at least to consign elements of that life which could not be destroyed completely and purely. These elements, removed from time and life, are assigned to a sepulchre that is perfectly recognizable because it is consecrated: the archives. Assigning them to this place makes it possible [. . .] to tame the violence and cruelty of which the 'remains' are capable, especially when these are abandoned to their own devices. (22)

The texts I've examined in this study illustrate the difficulties of ever fully laying the past to rest, or of "taming" the violence of history's remains; the Caribbean's past is not carried solely in written documents, easily catalogued and contained in a brick-and-mortar structure. Yet I would suggest that the archival impulse is a refusal to abandon history's remains to their own devices—that it is an attempt to account for them so that they don't catch the present unawares. In this accounting, the novels I examine work to

[131] González Echevarría argues that "Death [. . .] is the trope for the Archive's structuring principle" (28). Steedman, in *Dust*, refers to "the archives and its myriads of the dead" (17). Hartman succinctly labels the archive a "mortuary" (*Lose Your Mother* 17).

facilitate survival, opening outward to the future.

For each of the authors examined in this study, making life with the archive is an act akin to Goodison's "duppy conquering," requiring construction and creativity. Indeed, these writers undertake a project that Hal Foster describes as turning "'excavation sites' into 'construction sites'" (22)—using the archive not only to search for remains, but to build with those remains. Cliff and Alvarez choose to build counterarchives and counterhistories that provide the Caribbean and its diasporas with narratives of empowerment, thus affording potential healing to Caribbean subjects. Brand and Díaz build a counterarchive documenting what Sarah Ahmed calls "histories that hurt" ("Happy Objects" Loc. 716), demanding recognition of the traumatogenic structures that still undergird life in the New World. In so doing, they provide Caribbean and diasporic subjects a vocabulary with which to describe their own lived experiences, so often denied within dominant discourses.

Ultimately, *"To retrieve what was left"* illustrates what Mbembe asserts: "[t]he final destination of the archive [. . .] is always situated outside its own materiality, in the story that it makes possible" (21). The story made possible by these authors' deployment of the archival impulse is the story of that which Walcott describes as "the visible poetry of the Antilles" ("The Antilles"). Survival.

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